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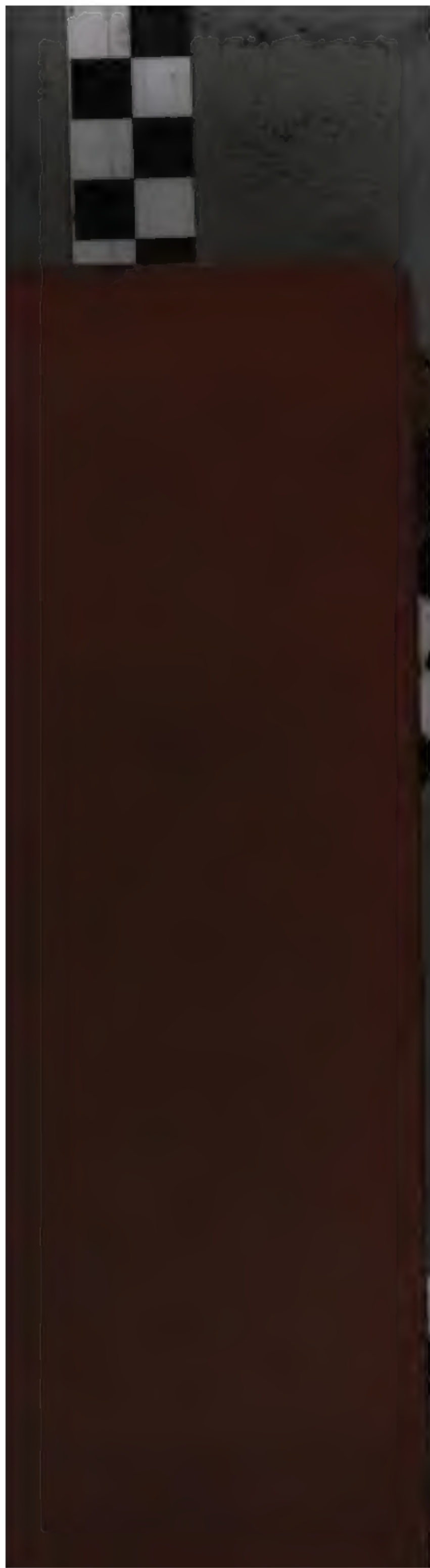
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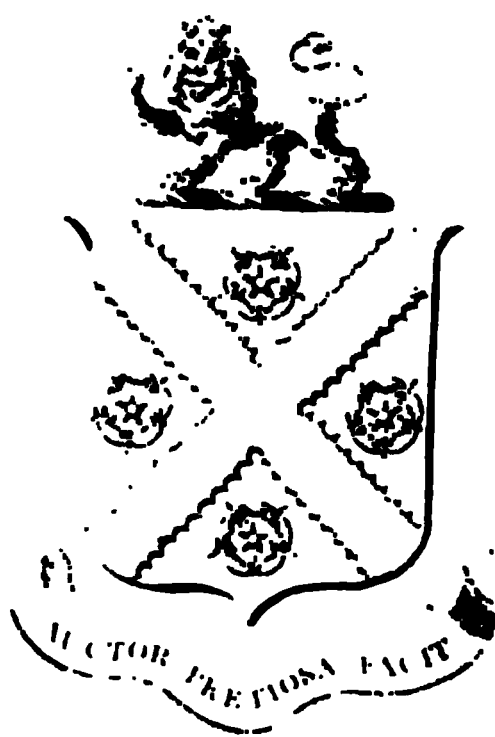
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1945



James Lennox



James James.





THE HISTORY OF
THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

VOLUME THE FIRST:

CONTAINING
THE THREE FIRST CENTURIES.



BY THE LATE
REV^D JOSEPH MILNER, A. M.

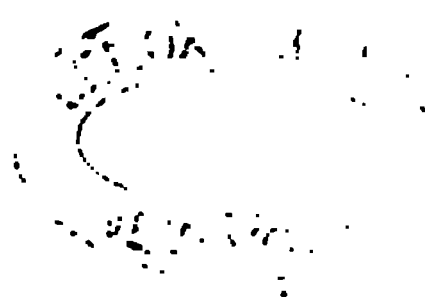
WITH ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS, BY THE
REV^D ISAAC MILNER, D. D. F. R. S.

DEAN OF CARLISLE,
AND PRESIDENT OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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INTRODUCTION,

BY THE AUTHOR.

IN my Proposals for printing this HISTORY of the CHURCH of CHRIST, I promised “an Ecclesiastical History on a new Plan.” The Reader therefore will naturally expect some distinct account of a Plan, which, in a subject so generally known, lays claim to novelty, in order that he may judge for himself, whether it appears sufficiently interesting to engage his perusal of the Work itself.

It is certain, that from our Saviour’s time to the present, there have ever been persons whose dispositions and lives have been formed by the rules of the New Testament; men, who have been REAL, not merely NOMINAL Christians; who believed the doctrines of the Gospel, loved them because of their divine excellency, and suffered gladly the LOSS OF ALL THINGS, THAT THEY MIGHT WIN CHRIST, AND BE FOUND IN HIM*. It is the history of these men which I propose to write. It is of no consequence with respect to my plan, nor of much importance, I believe, in its own nature, to what EXTERNAL Church they belonged. I intend not to enter with any nicety into an account of their rites and ceremonies, or forms of Church government, much less into their secular history. Even RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES shall be omitted; except those which seem to bear a relation to the essence of Christ’s religion, and of which the history of his

* Philipp. iii. 8, 9.

real Church requires some account. Let not the Reader expect, that the actions of great men—great in a secular view I mean—will be exhibited to his notice. Nothing, but what appears to me to belong to Christ's kingdom, shall be admitted: genuine piety is the only thing, which I intend to celebrate.

It must have struck a careful observer, that SUCH a history is as yet a great DESIDERATUM. Enmity against the Gospel has been fed, even to satiety, by the large displays of ECCLESIASTICAL WICKEDNESS. The wildest and the most visionary heretics have filled the historic page; and their follies, both in principle and practice, have been deemed worthy of a particular enumeration. The internal dissensions of Churches have been minutely described. The intricacies and intrigues of Popery, and indeed of every other secular system, which pretends to wear a religious garb, have been developed with a studious particularity: The connexion between the Church and the State has afforded very ample materials of what is commonly called Church History; and learning and philosophy have been much more respected than godliness and virtue.

No doubt, some more ancient voluminous Church Historians, as well as Mosheim in his Compendium, have given us much useful information; and if one might look on them as CIVIL historians altogether, there would not be much room for blame. Further, if they had incorporated into their secular narratives an account of the progress of godliness itself, I should not have dared to reprehend them as Ecclesiastical Historians: But they evidently give a much larger proportion to the history of wickedness, than to that of piety in general. Hence the evils, which have been practised in Christian countries, seem even greater than they really were; and, the disagreeable inference, which the reading of Mosheim produced in my own mind, is probably no singular case, viz.—

that real religion appears scarcely to have had any existence. Infidel malice has triumphed, though very unreasonably, on account of these things; the vices of Christians, so called, have certainly been exaggerated on the whole; and Deists and Sceptics have taken advantage, partly from such exaggeration and partly from the poverty of our information concerning Mahometans and Pagans, to represent BOTH as more virtuous than Christians.

What account can be given of this unhappily partial view of Church History?—Genuine godliness is fond of secrecy: Humility is of its essence: She seeks not the praise of men, but the praise of God; and hides even the good she does from the world more studiously than wickedness conceals its evils: Her sincerest votaries have, likewise, been chiefly private persons, such as have seldom moved in the public and noisy spheres of life. The most celebrated historians, who hitherto have appeared, seem not to have had so much relish for godliness, as to be induced to take any pains to draw her out of her modest obscurity*. The prevalence of wickedness

* Fox's Book of Martyrs is, however, one striking exception to this remark. The Magdeburgensian Centuriators, whom I did not meet with, till I had finished this Volume, are likewise, in part, exempted from the charge of writing Ecclesiastical History in the secular manner, which I have reprehended. Yet while they omit, or very lamely recount, some most important Christian facts, they relate with tedious exactness many uninteresting particulars. They seem, however, to have been men of real piety, industry, and learning, and may be of much use to me in subsequent parts of the history, should I continue it.

The volume of Mr. Newton is well known, and its merit has been acknowledged by men of piety and judgment. I once thought of beginning only where he ended. But as there is an unity of manner and style which belongs to every author who plans and executes for himself; and, as in some points I really found myself to differ in sentiment from this very respectable writer, I altered my opinion, contented in this place to acknowledge, that, so far as I can recollect, the perusal of his instructive volume of Ecclesiastical History first suggested to me the idea of this work.

in all ages has heightened the difficulty *. From these causes the scarcity of materials, for what properly deserves the name of Church History, is much greater than any person, who has not examined the subject, can even conceive. I have all along, however, to the best of my ability and opportunity, consulted original records, and have never contented myself with copying the sentiments of modern historians.

I hope I shall be allowed to call the plan, I propose, a proper one. Certainly, the terms "Church," and "Christian," do in their most NATURAL and PRIMARY SENSE respect only GOOD men. The Divine Founder of our religion has promised, THAT THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT. Such a succession of pious men in all ages must, therefore, have existed; and it will be no contemptible use of such a history as this, if it prove, that, in every age, there have been REAL followers of Christ. Other uses cannot fail to offer themselves. To see and trace the goodness of God taking care of his Church in every age by his Providence and Grace, will be, to the devout mind, a refreshment of the most grateful nature. The honour of Christianity will be supported; the value of its essential doctrines will be ascertained; and we shall have frequent occasion to state what the Gospel is, and what it is not. Hence the triumphs of the Sceptic will appear to be unfounded in truth; when it shall be evident on the whole,—that Christ's religion has ever existed, and brought forth its proper fruits, to which no other system can make any just pretension; and finally,—that the evils of which Christians, so called, have been guilty, arose not from the Gospel itself, but from the hypocrisy of those who assumed that worthy Name, to which neither their faith nor their practice gave them any right.

* A history of the perversions and abuses of religion is not properly a history of the Church; as absurd were it to suppose an history of the highwaymen that have infested this country to be a history of England.

These, and other obvious advantages of such a history, have determined me to attempt it. I feel oppressed with the greatness of the subject: Nevertheless, with God's help, I mean to proceed. IN MAGNIS VOLUISSE SAT EST.

I have two things further to promise: 1st, To assure the Reader that I shall think it my indispensable duty to give him real facts; and, if I be sometimes rather more copious in reflections than the severe laws of history allow, he will do well to observe, that the fashionable misrepresentations of ancient story require considerable attention.

And, 2dly, I fairly warn the Reader not to expect from me any indulgence in the modern taste of Scepticism. I shall not affect to doubt the credibility of ancient respectable historians. And, as it is hardly possible to avoid altogether the infection of the age in which one lives, I seem to myself sufficiently secured, by the torrent of prevailing opinions, from the other extreme of superstitious belief. Both ought to be avoided: but that, which supports itself by the appearance of extraordinary sense, by the authority of great names, and by the love of applause, must of course be the more ensnaring. The present age, in matters of religion, may justly be called the age of self-sufficiency: We condemn the ancients by wholesale, and without giving them a hearing: we suspect their historical accounts, without discrimination: malevolence and profaneness are both encouraged by such conduct: we fancy ourselves so ENLIGHTENED, as to be without any parallels in discernment: we are amazed, that our ancestors should so long have been deluded by absurdities; and, we are very little aware how much some future age will pity and blame us, for follies, of which we imagine ourselves perfectly clear.

J. M.

[Note to the Edition of 1810.]

THE Editor* takes this opportunity of most gratefully acknowledging the liberal patronage of the University of Cambridge, in having printed at their own expence four volumes of Mr. M.'s Ecclesiastical History. Their kindness and consideration in this matter makes an indelible impression on his mind : and, if any thing could increase his affectionate attachment to that learned Body, after so long and active a residence among them, it would be this honourable token of respect to the memory of his deceased Brother, who himself, many years ago, as a Student in the same Seminary †, received distinguished marks of approbation.

* The Rev. Isaac Milner, D. D. Dean of Carlisle, and President of Queen's College, Cambridge.

† Mr. M. took his degree of B. A. in the year 1766; and obtained, as a prize, one of the Chancellor's gold medals. The candidates were uncommonly numerous and able.

N. B.—Two handsome gold medals are given annually by the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, to such Bachelors of Arts as excel in classical learning.

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CHAP.

I.

of moral information, though it was extremely defective, and, in many points of view, fundamentally erroneous. But, of that knowledge which relates to repentance and remission of sins, they were totally destitute. Notwithstanding the light of the Old Testament, the provision of sacrifices, the declaration of so many prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the examples of so many holy men, who, in that dark and preparatory dispensation, had learned to fear God, and to believe in his promises of grace, it does not appear that the body of the Jewish nation were, in their religious state, materially better than the rest of the world. That men needed such a change of disposition as in Scripture is expressed by the term *μετανοια*, that they must become new creatures, and receive the forgiveness of sins by faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, were ideas unknown in Judea:—if indeed we except the dim light which visited the souls of Zacharias, of Simeon, of Anna, and of a few other devout persons, who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Such was the dismal night, in which the Sun of Righteousness made his appearance in the world. Scarcely in any age had ignorance and wickedness a more general prevalence. The history of Josephus evinces this. This author dwells chiefly indeed on public and political affairs; yet he throws a sufficient light on the manners of the times, and shows, that the extreme impiety and profligacy of the Herodian princes, were but too faithfully transcribed into the lives of their subjects. There had been periods of Jewish story more favourable to godliness: for instance the age of Joshua, of David, of Ezra, and of Nehemiah. For some persons there ever were who, at least, implicitly rested on the God of Israel, and trusted in the Redeemer that was to come. But the darkest season was chosen for the exhibition of the Light of Life by him, “who hath put the times and seasons in his own power.”

To know our own depravity and helplessness; and, by faith in Christ, to know “experimentally” the suitable and the efficacious cure, is doubtless the genuine secret of true piety. But wherever wickedness and profaneness have spread very generally, the knowledge of these doctrines is usually lost. Amidst a thousand disputes even on religious subjects, these are erased out of men’s creed,—the very doctrines—which alone can be the means of freeing them from vice and folly. It was their ignorance of these things, which moved the Son of God to lament the uninformed condition of the Jews at that time. To dwell on the history of Christ himself is foreign to my design. Indeed a few souls were converted during His abode on earth: but the five hundred brethren, who saw him all at one time after his resurrection, seem to have made the sum total of his disciples. And it may further be observed, that all these, and the eleven sincere Apostles themselves, were possessed with notions of a temporal kingdom, the rock on which their countrymen fatally split in their expositions of the Scriptures relating to the expected Messiah; and that they had not yet learned, with any clearness and steadiness of apprehension, to set their affections on things above.

And now was the critical moment, when it pleased God to erect the first Christian Church at Jerusalem. This was the first of those EFFUSIONS of the Spirit of God, which from age to age have visited the earth, since the coming of Christ, and prevented it from being quite overrun with ignorance and sin. It is an unspeakable advantage, that we have the sacred narrative to unfold this to our understandings. The want of such an advantage will appear too fully in the history of the succeeding EFFUSIONS* of the

First effusion of the Spirit.

* In the term effusion there is not here included the idea of the miraculous or extraordinary operations of the Spirit of God, but only of such operations as he vouchsafes in every age to his church. The plan of this History has little connection with the former. It is, however, to be remembered, that a remarkable

Divine Spirit. Our duty however is not to complain, but to be thankful. If we carefully attend to this first instance, it will serve as a specimen, by which to try other religious phænomena: and whether they lead to genuine piety or not, may generally be judged from their agreement or disagreement with this.

Let us then observe the circumstances in which this effusion of the Holy Spirit was vouchsafed. As repentance and remission of sins were leading doctrines of Christ's religion, the most ample room had been made for them by the completion of his redemption. He had offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, "was risen" from the dead "for our justification," and in the sight of his disciples was just ascended up to heaven. That the Gospel, the good news for penitent sinners, the good news of reconciliation with God, should begin at Jerusalem, the scene of so much wickedness perpetrated, and of so much grace abused, was itself no mean argument of the riches of Divine Goodness, and was an illustrious exemplification of the grand purpose of the Gospel,—to justify the ungodly, and to quicken the dead. By the order of their Divine Master, the Apostles remained at Jerusalem, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit "which they had heard of him*," and abode in mutual charity, and in the fervent exercise of prayer and supplication. What the Holy Spirit was to do for them, they seemed little to understand; if one may conjecture from their last question to their Master, "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" it is natural to apprehend, that they were feasting their imaginations with the delightful prospect of a splendid kingdom, attended with all the circumstances of external pomp and grandeur.

display of the Divine Grace, at some particular season, is always intended by the expressions **EFFUSION** of the Spirit of God, or **EFFUSION** of the Divine or Holy Spirit.

* Acts, i. 4.

OF JERUSALEM.

CENT
I.

Principalities and lordships were, in their fancy, soon to be assumed in the room of fishermen's nets and boats, and they pleased themselves with the notion of their Master's external dominion in the world. Not that they were without a genuine taste for something infinitely better. At any rate, they afford us a useful lesson ;—" they continued in prayer and supplication." In every age, they who do so, shall doubtless understand, in God's due time, what the kingdom of heaven means, and find by happy experience that kingdom established in their own souls, even " righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

During this interesting crisis, we do not find them employed in any other business than this of prayer, except in filling up the apostolical college of twelve, by the substitution of Matthias in the room of the unhappy Judas, who, for the love of a little gain of this world, had unfitted himself for the riches of the next, and rendered himself unworthy to partake of the marvellous scene now about to be exhibited. Behold then the twelve Apostles, Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes, Judas the brother of James, and Matthias, expecting and longing for the unspeakable blessings of true Christianity !

Matthias
substitute
in the place
of Judas
Iscariot.

The Pentecost, one of the Jewish festivals, was the era of the Divine Visitation. The Apostles were all in harmony assembled together ; when lo ! suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Their master in his conference with Nicodemus*, had compared the operations of the Holy Spirit to the wind, and the sound from heaven on this occasion was a just emblem of the power of the Divine Influence now commencing. And there appeared " unto them cloven tongues like as of fire,

* John, .iii.

CHAP.
I.

and it sat upon each of them*.” Another emblem no less just, which the Church of England uses in her hymn to the Holy Ghost in the ordination-office,

“ Thy blessed unction from above,
“ Is comfort, life, and fire of love.”

In truth they now found they were “ baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire†.” And the effects in purifying their hearts, in enlightening their understandings, and in furnishing them with gifts, and zeal, and boldness, hitherto unknown, were very soon exhibited. They were all filled with the “ Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Of the many miraculous gifts now imparted, this of tongues, at once so useful for the propagation of the Gospel, and so striking an attestation of its truth, first displayed itself to the amazement of a number of Jews, out of every nation under heaven, who heard these Galileans speak each in his own language. There is reason to believe, that, as many of them were devout men, they had been prepared by Divine Grace for the effectual reception of the Gospel, and that a considerable part of the first converts were of their body.

Peter's
discourse.

While many were expressing their admiration at this strange event, others, whom we may suppose to have been chiefly the native Jews, who understood not these several languages, derided the Apostles as intoxicated with wine: and now the zeal of Peter was stirred up to preach both to those who admired, and to those who scorned. He begged them to have so much candour, as not rashly to suppose them to be men overcome with liquor, which the very time of the day rendered improbable, the third hour of the day, answering to our nine in the morning, when it should seem the Jews were rarely known to be in that situation. And as his audience professed a regard

* Acts, ii.

† Matt. iii. 11.

for the sacred oracles, he pointed out to them a remarkable prophecy, in the second chapter of Joel, then fulfilling, namely, the promise of an effusion of the Spirit upon all flesh, attended with dreadful punishments on those who should despise it:—yet that whoever, in the deep sense of his sinfulness and misery, should call on the name of the Lord, should be saved. He then shows them how God had fulfilled his own purposes in the death of Jesus, at the very time when they had been executing the dictates of their own malice. He proceeds to testify also of his resurrection, according to the testimony of David, in Psal. xvi. and cx. in both which Psalms it was evident, that not David himself, but Christ, was the subject of the prophecy. He openly declares that he himself and his brethren were witnesses of the resurrection of their Master, that he was exalted to heaven, and had received of the father the promise of the Holy Ghost, which he had now shed forth on the Apostles, and concerning which they now had the plain demonstration of their senses. The conclusion which he draws from this chain of argument, supported by the mutual strength of facts and prophecies, was this,—that the despised person, whom they had thought unworthy to live, and had exposed to the most painful and ignominious death, was owned by the God of their Fathers to be the Lord and Messiah, who was the expectation of the Jews, and through whom alone salvation was offered to sinful men.

The design of the whole sermon was evidently to produce conviction of sin in the hearers; and it pleased God to crown it with success. Multitudes were pricked in their hearts: they found themselves guilty of murdering the Christ of God; and so powerfully were they struck with a sense of their extreme unworthiness, that they found themselves also destitute of all resources in themselves. They cry to Peter and to the rest, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Similar indeed is the beginning

the mutual offices of social kindness: even their bodily food was received with a gladness before unknown. The Grace of God gave a pleasant tincture to every object with which they conversed; and while they extolled it with their hearts and lips, they, as yet, found favour with all the people. The natural enmity of the heart against the Gospel of Christ did not at first show itself, and the purity of their lives could not but recommend them to the esteem of others. “The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.” Thus plainly St. Luke intimates WHOSE grace it was that effected all this, and that his hand, in the Divine Effusion here described, ought ever to be acknowledged.

A miracle wrought soon after by Peter and John on a lame man, a well-known beggar above forty years old, gave a farther attestation to their divine authority. Peter was hence led to preach* to the admiring multitude, the same doctrine of repentance and remission, and thus he exalted the Lord Jesus as the Holy One, and the Just, and the Prince of Life, to whom they had wickedly preferred even a murderer, Barabbas. He disclaims all merit in himself or in his colleagues in the miracle: he shows that God had glorified his Son Jesus; and that it was through faith in his name, that the act had been performed. He charitably alleges their ignorance, as the only possible alleviation of their guilt; and which indeed alone prevented it from being unpardonable. He exhorts them to repentance and conversion, and lays open to their view the prospect, not of a temporal, but of a spiritual kingdom; in the hope of which they were to rejoice, and patiently bear the afflictions of this present life: he warns them at the same time of the threats denounced by Moses against the despisers of the Messiah, through whom alone salvation was offered to all nations, though the first invitation was addressed to the Jews.

* Acts, iii.

The Church was now increased to five thousand ; and the signal for persecution was raised by the magistrates of Jerusalem, many of whom were Sadducees, enemies to the doctrine of a resurrection, and, in truth, to every thing that had any tendency to raise men's minds above the world. The two Apostles were imprisoned that evening, but their examination was deferred till the next day. The high priest, and the persons of greatest authority, looked on this matter as an occasion of sufficient consequence to require the calling of a solemn court. Peter to their interrogatories frankly answers, that the miracle had been " wrought in the name of Jesus, whom YE crucified, whom God raised from the dead." He boldly rebukes them for their contempt of Him, who is the only Saviour: For " there is none other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved."

CENT.
I.
Increase of
the Church

The wisdom and boldness of two unlettered fishermen, who had been companions of Jesus, struck the court with astonishment. But finding no present opportunity of gratifying their malice, on account of the splendor of the miracle, they dismissed them with a strict charge to be silent in future concerning the name of Jesus, though the Apostles ingenuously confessed their inability to comply with such an order, because, " they must obey God rather than men."

The Apostles returned to their company*, and reporting the threats of the magistrates, they all, with united supplication, intreated the Lord to grant them boldness to persevere, notwithstanding the menaces of His and their enemies. They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and enabled to proceed with calm intrepidity.

The most perfect unanimity as yet prevailed among the Christians; and they not only professed to have all things common, but also practised the rule accordingly with the greatest cheerfulness.

* Acts, iv.

CHAP.

I.

Divine Grace was largely diffused among them. The poor lacked nothing: the richer brethren converted their possessions into money, and left the distribution of the whole to the discretion of the Apostles. And, in this liberality, Barnabus of Cyprus, a Levite, who had lands of his own, most probably in his native country, was eminently distinguished.

It appeared very manifest, that the Apostles enjoyed much more of the power of Christ's religion than they had ever done while their Master was with them on earth. Such was the effect of the EFFUSION of the Spirit. We hear no more of their dreams concerning a temporal kingdom. The courage of Peter in confronting the magistrates, forms a perfect contrast to his timidity in denying his Master. Wherever the same repentance, faith, hope, charity, heavenly-mindedness appear, THERE is true Christianity; and there also the enmity of the world will be excited. Of this something has already discovered itself, and more is now calling for our attention, as well as something much more grievous,—the detection of hypocrisy in certain professors of Christianity.

The case of Judas has already prepared the Church to expect the appearance of tares among the wheat; and our Lord's parable alluded to, had assured them of it. Yet when such things occur, good men are often too much surprised, and the wicked unreasonably triumph. There was one Ananias among the disciples, whose conscience had so far been impressed, as to respect that doctrine and fellowship to which he had joined himself, but whose heart was never divorced from the love of the world. A regard for his reputation induced him to sell his possessions with the rest: but the fear of poverty, and the want of faith in God, disposed him to reserve part of the price, while he brought the other to the Apostles. Peter upbraided him with his being under the influence of Satan, "in lying to the Holy Ghost:" showed him that the guilt of his hypocrisy was

aggravated by this consideration, that the action was committed not against man, but against God ; and that nothing could be said to extenuate his baseness, because he was under no necessity of selling his property at all, or of laying it at the Apostles' feet, after he had sold it. Immediately the unhappy man fell down dead : and, about three hours after, his wife Sapphira was made a similar monument of divine justice and provocation, as she had been partaker of her husband's guilt.

Such a proof of the discernment of spirits, and of the power of punishing hypocrisy, resting in the governors of the Church, filled all, who heard these things, with awe. The Lord had now shown his holiness, as well as his grace ; and the love of the world, the standing heresy, which infects his Church in all ages, was a second time punished by a signal interposition of heaven. Multitudes of both sexes were added to the Church, chiefly of the common people. Of the rest, indeed, though some could not but entertain favourable sentiments of Christianity, yet, among the rich and great, none durst hazard his character so far as to espouse it*.

The Sadducees appear at this time to have had the chief sway in the Jewish state. These formed a licentious, worldly-minded sect ; and in their opinions they were the most corrupt of all those which at that time were maintained in Judea. The high priest and his party were of this sect, and were filled with indignation, to see the progress of the Gospel. Their first step was to imprison the Apostles, who, by night, through the ministry of an angel, were set free, and ordered to preach in the temple. The next morning a full Sanhedrim was convened, and the Apostles were ordered to be brought into court, An angel had opened the prison doors ; and the court was astonished to find that the prisoners had escaped out of prison : they were, however, informed,

Persecution
of the
Apostles.

* Acts, v.

that they were preaching in the temple. The favourable regard of the common people obliged the Sanhedrim to use some address in conducting their prisoners in a gentle manner before the court. The high priest upbraids them with their disobedience to the former injunction of silence, to whom they returned their former answer, "that they ought to obey God rather than men." They bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, and declared, that "God had exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," and that the "Holy Ghost, whom God bestows on those who obey him, witnessed" the same thing. With such plainness did these first Christians lay open the real nature of the Gospel, and exhibit it as something extremely different from a mere system of morals, though it included all good morality in its nature. The testimony of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins through his blood, and the operations of the Holy Ghost, as they were doubtless the peculiar characteristics of Christianity, so they were those things which most offended the Jewish rulers, and have been indeed the chief object of the enmity of unconverted men in all ages.

The spirit of persecution was proceeding to exercise itself in violent counsels. There was however one Gamaliel among them, a Pharisee, of a sect not indeed inimical to the doctrine of a resurrection, and by no means so heterodox in general as the Sadducees, though on the whole agreeing with them in the hatred of Christianity. This man was judicious, learned, and respectable, and possessed much worldly prudence. Beyond this no evidence appears. Providence made an important use of him, at this time, to prolong twelve most valuable lives, who were designed to spread the Gospel through the world; and by their inspired writings (not one of which was yet published) to speak to us at this day. Gamaliel, by some authentic historical precedents, instructed the

members of the court, that persons, who rose up to propagate new sects, if not sent of God, were soon annihilated. He wished them to exercise forbearance and moderation toward the Apostles, whose influence would soon come to nothing, if it were merely human; if divine, to attempt its destruction would be equally foolish and impious. This sage advice was followed, and the Apostles were dismissed, but not without stripes, and a severe charge given them, no more to preach in the name of Jesus. They ceased not however to “teach and preach Jesus Christ, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”

The Church was now much enlarged, consisting partly of native, partly of foreign Jews, who used the Greek language, called on that account Hellenists, or Grecians. These supposed, that in the daily supply of the poor, the Apostles had not ministered equal relief to their widows, as to those of the Hebrews. Men who know any thing of the work of God, in the visitation of his Holy Spirit, and have any acquaintance with the fulness of employ, which Christian ministers have in great and populous cities, in instructing, warning, consoling, and directing awakened and serious minds, will not wonder, if through inadvertence, some temporary neglects might have taken place. The Apostles, however, with great mildness and wisdom, soon regulated this affair. They informed the disciples, that the ministry of the word of God must be attended to in the first place, and must not be neglected for the sake of providing for the poor. They therefore advised the disciples to look out for seven holy and wise men, to whom this business should be committed. “But we,” say they, “will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*.” O that those who call themselves their successors, were always disposed in like manner!—The whole multitude consented

Choice of
Deacons.

* Acts, vi. 4.

CHAP.

I.

with pleasure. Seven deacons were amicably elected, Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, every one of whom has a Grecian name, and therefore may have been an Hellenist; and in this easy way the first appearances of contention were blasted in the Church, and seven coadjutors were appointed to the Apostles, some of whom, at least, were of signal service, not only in temporal, but also in spiritual things. So happy is it, to be under the conduct of the Holy Spirit, and so amiably did the Love of Christ then rule in the hearts of his people. Even many of the priests now obeyed the Gospel, and Jerusalem saw continually large accessions made to the Church.

Of these deacons, Stephen was at first the most distinguished. A synagogue of Hellenist Jews held a contest with him, the result of which filled them with such vexation, that they suborned men to accuse him of blasphemy against Moses, and against God. By this artifice, Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrim, where God threw a lustre over his countenance, which even his enemies could not but observe. In his defence he boldly rebuked the Jews, and showed that their conduct was but too faithful a copy of that of their fathers, who had treated Moses and the prophets with contempt, and had murdered a number of those, who had prophesied of the coming of the just One—of whom they had now been the betrayers and murderers, while they vainly gloried in the magnificence of their temple, and put external services in the room of genuine piety.

Martyrdom
of Stephen.

Thus did Stephen aim at the same point with Peter, to convince his audience of sin in the first place, and to leave them no hope in their own righteousness. Seldom has the contrast between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God appeared more striking. “They were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth.” But he, “full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly to heaven, and saw the

glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," and what he saw, he openly confessed. Their patience was exhausted, and they stoned him to death, while he was calling upon his Divine Master, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Thus firm and constant was his faith: and his charity was no less conspicuous. For, he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" thus showing how entirely void of malice were those very vehement rebukes, which he had uttered against their wickedness, and which men of pusillanimous prudence are in all ages disposed to condemn. And when he had said this he fell asleep* ;—the usual beautiful phrase of the New Testament, to express the death of saints, and at the same time to intimate their expectation of a happy resurrection.

The eloquence of a Cicero would be mere feebleness on this occasion. All praise is below the excellency of that spirit, which shone in this first of Martyrs. Let it stand as an example of the genuine temper of martyrdom, of real faith in Christ, and of real charity to men ;—and let heroes of the world, on the comparison, hide their heads in confusion.

Pontius Pilate having been disgraced, Judea seems at this time to have been without a procurator ; and Vitellius, the governor of Syria, was a man of great moderation toward the Jews. In these circumstances the mildness of the Roman government was eventually the occasion of a severe persecution to the church. The Jewish magistrates, who a little before had not the power of life and death, and could not murder the Lord of Life without the intervention of their Roman masters, were now left to themselves, at least in religious concerns, and Stephen was their first Christian victim. He was buried with great lamentation by the Church ; and a considerable number suffered soon after his decease.

* Acts, vii.

A young man called Saul, an Hellenist*, of Tarsus, a person of an active ambitious spirit, who had been educated at Jerusalem, under Gamaliel, and outstripped all his equals in Judaical learning, distinguished himself in this persecution. He took care of the clothes of the witnesses who were employed in stoning Stephen†, and made havock of the church, entering into "every house, and haling men and women, he committed them to prison; and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them." In truth, the disciples seemed now to be left to the rage of men disposed to show them no mercy; and a superficial observer might have supposed, that the fate of Theudas and Judas, mentioned by Gamaliel, was about to attend the Christians. Men had not yet learned that the "blood of the Martyrs was the seed of the Church." The religious worship of the disciples must, doubtless, have suffered a grievous interruption. Indeed none of them found it safe to remain at Jerusalem. The Apostles alone thought good to stand their ground, and, by the watchful care of their God, they were preserved. The Christians, dispersed throughout Judea and Samaria, preached the word wherever they went. And thus this persecution was the first occasion of the diffusion of the Gospel through various regions, and what was designed to annihilate it was overruled to extend it exceedingly. But we shall confine ourselves in this section to the Church of Jerusalem.

Conversion
of Saul, or
Paul;

A. D.

36.

Saul, who was all attention to the work of persecution, was vexed to hear, that a number of the Christians had escaped to Damascus, an ancient city of Syria; and he procured a commission from the high priest to bring them bound to Jerusalem, It was a considerable journey, but religious glory

* That is, one born and bred a Jew in some country where the Greek language was spoken.

† Acts, viii.

was his idol. When he was near to Damascus, a sudden light from heaven, exceeding even that of the sun*, arrested the daring zealot, and struck him to the ground. At the same time a voice called to him, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." In this marvellous manner did the Son of God make known his truth, his majesty, and his power, to this enterprising persecutor, and evince to all ages, what he can do to the "praise of the glory of his grace." The will of Saul was broken, and for the first time made submissive to God, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" was his cry; and whenever this is uttered from the heart, it will not fail to bring down the divine blessing. He was directed to go into Damascus, where he remained three days without sight and without food, yet constantly employed in prayer for divine grace and mercy. Thus the necessity of the conviction of sin was preached to him, with circumstances more extraordinary than those which took place upon the preaching to the three thousand first converts; but the spiritual instruction conveyed was precisely the same. The work of converting grace may vary very much in non-essential circumstances,—its nature never varies. The grace of forgiveness by Jesus Christ would have been no welcome news to this Pharisee, had he still remained in the confidence of his own righteousness; but now it was as life from the dead. After three days, by the particular direction of a vision from the Lord Jesus, Ananias, a disciple of Damascus, was sent to him with the tidings of peace. He had heard of the active malice of Saul, but was encouraged to go by a positive declaration that Saul was a chosen vessel. Ananias opened his commission by informing Saul, that the Lord Jesus had sent him, to the

* Acts, ix.

end that he might receive his sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Both these effects immediately took place. Ananias exhorted him to delay no longer, but to “wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord*.” He was baptized, and soon refreshed both in mind and body; and from that time the whole vehemence of his natural character, and the whole power of his intellectual faculties, which were doubtless of the first magnitude among men, were sanctified to the service of Jesus Christ; and until his death, he was engaged in a course of labours in the Church with unparalleled success. For this is he who is commonly known by the name of St. Paul, and “his memorial is blessed for ever.” He was particularly commissioned to preach to the Gentiles; and of all the Apostles he seems to have entered with the greatest penetration into the nature of Christianity. Salvation by grace through faith was his darling theme, a doctrine diametrically opposite to the self-righteous scheme in which he had been wont to glory. His countrymen, the Jews, were particularly fierce in opposing this grand article of the Gospel, and were stung to the quick when attacked by their once favourite champion. No doubt he had been sincere in his religion formerly; yet, is he far from exculpating himself on this account. On the contrary, he magnifies the grace of the Lord Jesus, as extended to him, a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious, and the chief of sinners†, in whom the long-suffering of the Lord had been exhibited, “for a pattern to them who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting:”—that mankind may know, that God accepts sinners on Christ’s account alone, and through faith in his blood; and that nothing can be more contrary to the whole design of the Gospel, than to seek salvation by our own works of any kind. He seems ever after to have lamented deeply the miserable state of his countrymen, who

* Acts, xxii. 16.

† 1 Tim. i.

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“had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*.” He pitied their self-righteous notions: he knew by his own experience how deceitful such notions were to those who were under the power of them: and, while he rejoiced on account of that grace which had redeemed himself from hell, he commiserated those, who were fast advancing thither in fearless presumption. In the third chapter of the Philippians, he gives us a very particular view of himself. To trust in any thing for salvation, except Christ alone, is with him “to have confidence in the flesh.” No man appeared once to have had more just pretensions to such confidence than himself. His regular circumcision on the eighth day, Hebrew descent, Pharisaic strictness, zealous Judaism, and blameless morals, seemed to exalt him above the common level of his countrymen: but he declares that he “reckoned all these things as dung, that he might win Christ;” and in him alone he desires to be found, without his own righteousness to trust in; and he maintains the settled determination of his soul in this article of justification. Were it not for the perverse blindness of fallen nature, one might be astonished to find many persons of learning and good sense, after reading this account of the Apostle by himself, still endeavouring to represent him as mixing grace and works in the subject of justification, and describing him as only excluding ceremonial works from the office of justifying a sinner. But to proceed:

Having preached Christ for three years abroad, he went up to Jerusalem. Here he attempted to join himself to the Church, but the remembrance of what he had been, and the very imperfect account which they had of what he then was, prevented the Christians from receiving him, till Barnabas brought him to the Apostles (two of them only, Peter and James† the Lord’s brother) and informed them of

* Rom. x.

† Gal. i. 18, 19. & Acts, ix. 27.

his genuine conversion. This cleared up all doubts ; and he was now engaged in the work of the ministry at Jerusalem, and would gladly have remained there, but the Lord, by a vision, assured him that the Jews would not receive his testimony ; and that the great scene of his labours was to be among the Gentiles.

In fact, some address was needful in his brethren to save his life from the rage of the Jews, and he was conducted to his native city of Tarsus. By this time, however, the fury of persecution subsided : the Lord gave rest to his Church : and the disciples both at Jerusalem and elsewhere, walked in the very best manner, in which they can walk on this side heaven, “ in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Where these go together, excesses of all sorts are prevented ; and inward joy and outward obedience conspire to demonstrate, that there Christ reigns indeed.

Yet so slow are men to receive new divine truths, especially those which militate against old prejudices, that the Christians of Jerusalem contended with Peter on account of his intercourse with the Gentiles of Cæsarea. The fierceness of Peter’s natural character was now abated : with great meekness he reasoned on the case with his bigoted brethren, and convinced them, by the evident proofs of the grace of God being vouchsafed to Gentiles, that it was lawful to have communion with them*. They glorified God, saying, “ Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance to life.” Unutterable grace indeed to us, confessed at length and owned by our elder brethren the Jews ! David had just reason to say, “ Let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man †.” Even a converted Jew admits with difficulty, that the grace of God may visit a Gentile !

* Acts, xi.

† 2 Sam. xxiv. 14.

OF JERUSALEM,

The visits of Paul to Jerusalem seem to have been but short. The body of the Jewish nation sought his destruction; and his Gentile connexions and very reserved practice of Mosaical ceremonies, rendered him no peculiar favourite in the mother-church, though they “could not but glorify the grace of God which was in him*.” But the Church is not perfect on earth. His next return to Jerusalem was, however, of a popular kind, namely, to convey the alms of Gentile converts to the Jewish Christians oppressed by a “famine, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar†.” His companion to Jerusalem was Barnabas, whose liberality in the beginning had been so eminent. This service being discharged, they both returned to minister to the Gentiles.

The civil power of Judea was now in the hands of Herod Agrippa, a great favourite of the Roman emperor, a person of considerable talents, and full of that specious virtue, which, in secular annals, would entitle him to great renown. In the Church of Christ he stands a persecutor, and his virtues are, in the strong but just language of Augustine‡, splendid sins. Yet his persecution was not the effect of a cruel temper. Had the Jews regarded Christianity with a favourable eye, he, at least, would have protected it. But long before this time the general favour of the common people toward the Christians had been dissipated by the active malice of the rulers, and Christ was found to have no lasting friends, but those whom he made so by effectual grace. The first victim of this political persecution was James the son of Zebedee: he was slain with the sword, the first of the Apostles, who departed from the Church below, to join that which is above.

Finding that the act was popular, Herod attempted to dispatch Peter also§. But God had

* Gal. i. ult.

† Splendida peccata.

‡ Acts, xi. toward the end.

§ Acts, xii.

reserved him for more services ; and yet, in all appearance, there was no hope of his preservation. He was imprisoned, and strictly guarded, with a view, after the passover, when the concourse of Jews at Jerusalem was very large, to have him publicly executed. The king was pleased with the idea of ingratiating himself with his subjects ; but the Church has arms, which men of the world understand not, and they were vigorously used on this occasion.

A spirit of earnest persevering prayer was poured on the Church of Jerusalem. The Lord delayed to answer, till the critical moment ;—a method not uncommon of exercising the faith, and zeal, and patience of his people. By the miraculous interposition of an angel, Peter, the night before his intended execution, was delivered from prison. At first he imagined that to be done in vision, which was a reality. At length being fully come to himself, and reflecting on what the Lord had done, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, a woman of eminent piety and of some opulence, where many Christians were gathered together in the religious employment of prayer. Those only, who know what the spirit of prayer is, can conceive the vehemence of wrestling, which then engaged Christian hearts. The scene which followed was at once most astonishing and most pleasing. They hear a person knocking at the door ; a young woman named Rhoda comes to hearken ; she knows Peter's voice ; joy prevents her from opening the gate ; she returns to inform the supplicants, that Peter stood before it ; they are induced to suspect her of insanity, rather than to believe that their prayers were heard ; so slow are even the best to believe the goodness of God. She perseveres in her first assertion ; it must then, say they, be his angel *. Peter continues knocking ; they open at length ; they behold him and are

* The idea of the ministry of angels among men was popular with the Jews ; possibly these good men might carry it too far, but I pretend not to settle the point.

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astonished. Having waved his hand, and brought them to silence, he informs them of the Lord's wonderful interposition in his favour. Go, says he, and show these things to James, and the brethren. James, who was the Lord's brother, with himself and John, had the greatest concern in the government of the mother Church* at that time. Peter retires then to a place of concealment.

Little did Herod apprehend that his own death should precede that of his prisoner. On a public occasion, in which he appeared in great splendor, he delivered an oration, so pleasing to his audience, that they shouted, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." That moment he was smitten with an incurable disease by an angel, because he "gave not God the glory." That pride and ambition, which had gained him the character of a patriot, orator, and statesman, were punished with death by Him, who "seeth not as man seeth;" and he fell a warning to princes, not to seek glory in opposition to God.

The next memorable circumstance in the history of the mother-church will deserve our particular attention. This was the first Christian council. The controversy which occasioned it, involved a subject of vast consequence in real religion.

† About twenty years had elapsed since the effusion of the Spirit had commenced; a period of time in which, even in the midst of one of the most wicked nations in the world, in Jerusalem and in its neighbourhood, God had erected his kingdom in the hearts of thousands who had lived in great unanimity and charity, "keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," conscious of their Divine Master's

* Gal. ii. 9.

† I once for all observe here, that the niceties of Chronology make no part of my study in this work. Yet I shall endeavour to attend so much to historical connexion, as to be generally right within a few years. This seems sufficient for my purpose; and whoever attends to the second and third chapters to the Galatians, will see, that I cannot err much in this instance.

spiritual presence, and rejoicing in hope of his second coming to complete their felicity. In his strength, they had sustained, with much patience, two very severe persecutions, in the former of which a Deacon, in the second an Apostle, had sealed the truth with their blood. In an earlier part of this period their holy harmony had been a little interrupted by a secular contention ; but this was soon composed. The time was not yet arrived, when those, who called themselves Christians, could so much forget the dignity of their profession, as to contend passionately for worldly things. The present controversy had a more intimate connexion with the Christian religion itself, and therefore seemed more likely to disturb the union of men, with whom spiritual objects were the chief ground of concern. The Jews were strongly attached to their own religious national peculiarities. Under the influence of pride, envy, and other evil passions, this disposition supported the spirit of self-righteousness. Nothing could be more contrary to the genius of the Gospel than the attempt of some Christian Jews, who endeavoured to infuse into the Gentile converts an idea of the necessity of circumcision, and of obedience to the whole of the Mosaic ceremonial, in order to salvation. Some of the Pharisees themselves were now real Christians, but they were displeased to see and hear of so many Gentiles admitted into the Christian Church, and regarded by the Apostles as on an equal footing with themselves in the favour of God. Thus were their minds darkened with respect to the article of justification : and, before they were aware, by thus insisting on the necessity of circumcision, they practically averred, that the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was not sufficient for man's salvation ; that the favour of God was to be purchased by human works, in part at least ; and that their ritual observances contributed to their acceptance with God.

This was the first time that the natural pride and

OF JERUSALEM.

ignorance of the human heart, disguised under the pretence of religious zeal, attempted to undermine the simplicity of the faith, by which hitherto Christians had rested with complacency on Jesus alone, had enjoyed peace of conscience, and had been constrained to obedience by love. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas looked on the growing evil with a jealous eye, and after no small fruitless altercation with the zealots, thought it better to refer the full consideration of the question to a council of Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem. And now Paul returned to Jerusalem the third time since his conversion, and about seventeen years after it; and, in his progress with Barnabas, reported the conversion of the Gentiles, which gave great joy to the Christian Jews in general.

At the Council, Peter, who had returned to Jerusalem, and since Agrippa's death was no longer molested, opened the debate by observing, that a considerable time ago, God had selected him to preach to the Gentiles, and had blessed his labours with unequivocal success, in purifying their hearts by faith, and in dispensing the Holy Ghost among them, no less than on the Jews. After God himself had thus decided, he said it appeared presumptuous in any person to impose a yoke on the Gentiles, from which the Divine Indulgence had exempted them. He insisted that the yoke itself, especially when laid on the conscience as necessary to salvation, was intolerable: and he concluded, that even they, who still, for charitable and prudential reasons, persisted in the ritual observances, were yet obliged to repose for salvation only on the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," as well as these Gentiles, who never had observed them at all. This full testimony of Peter was supported by Paul and Barnabas, who gave ample proof of the Divine Grace vouchsafed to the Gentiles. James, who seems to have been the standing pastor of Jerusalem, confirmed the same argument, by the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeable to Peter's

declaration of the mercy of God in visiting the Gentiles. He gave his opinion, that the Gentiles should no longer be molested with notions subversive of the grace of God, and tending to teach them dependence on human works instead of the atonement of Christ for salvation. Only he recommended, that the Council should direct them to abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled and from blood*. For the number of Jews dispersed through Gentile cities, who heard Moses read every Sabbath-day, required these precautions.

A letter was sent according to these views; nor does it appear that there was one dissenting voice in the Council. It is remarkable, that the synod used this striking expression of censure against the zealots. they “troubled you with words, subverting your souls.” Certainly the charitable Apostles would not so strongly have rebuked a trifling error. Nor is there, I think, any other method of understanding this aright, but on the principle already stated, that the harm did not consist in practising these ceremonies, though virtually abrogated by the death of Christ. For these were practised by the Apostles themselves, constantly by such as lived in Judea, and occasionally by the rest. The real fault was the depending upon them for salvation, in opposition to the grace of Christ. Here the Apostles knew it behoved them to be jealous, that God might be glorified, and souls comforted: and the joy, and consolation, and establishment in the faith†, which ensued amongst the Gentiles, confirms this interpretation.

It is to be feared, that the Church of Jerusalem

* Though an idol was nothing, and what was offered to it was nothing, yet St. Paul has given solid reasons why Christians should abstain from such meats. Fornication was a sin, concerning the evil of which the heathen converts might be, he apprehended, as yet uninformed; and to abstain from things strangled and from blood, was necessary, in order to have any intercourse with Jews.

† Acts, xv. 31. and xvi. 5.

received not all the benefit, which was to be wished from the wisdom and charity of the Council, though it doubtless would be of service to many. But its most wholesome effects were felt among the Gentiles. The account, which we have in the Epistle to the Galatians, leads us to suspect that the self-righteous spirit had a very deep influence among some members of the Church at Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul was obliged to exercise a particular caution among them and to confer in private with the pillars of the Church, lest he should give umbrage to the Jewish Christians, and injure his own usefulness among his countrymen*. In this he acted with equal prudence and charity: yet nothing could induce him to act inconsistently with the faith. To press the Gentile converts to Jewish conformity, appeared to him in this light, as no reasons but those of peace, charity, and prudential expediency, could be pleaded for the continuance of such observances, even among Jews: and therefore among Gentiles, who never had been under the yoke, no other construction could be put on the practice, than that it was necessary to salvation, and that the primary doctrine of the Christian religion, the sufficiency of the blood of Christ for pardon of sin, was disbelieved. The same Apostle therefore, who, on another occasion circumcised Timothy† because of the Jews in the neighbourhood, he being by the mother's side of Hebrew extraction, now insisted, that Titus, a perfect Gentile, should not be circumcised‡, because of false brethren, who had craftily introduced themselves among the Christians, with a view to undermine their dependence on Jesus, and to draw them back to the self-righteousness of Judaism. The liberty of Christ was what he was zealous to support; and he would not, for an hour, allow any self-righteous mixtures, “that the truth of the Gospel might continue with them;” an expression, which throws farther light on the controversy

* Gal. ii.

† Acts, xvi. 3.

‡ Gal. ii.

we have reviewed; and shows distinctly, that not circumcision itself, but the dependence on it for salvation in the room of Christ, was the great object of the Apostle's opposition.

He had hitherto found, to his satisfaction, that all his brethren of the Apostolic college had heartily concurred in checking the progress of self-righteousness. But a lamentable instance of human imbecility soon appeared. Peter, after having* taken a social meal with some Gentile converts, afterwards withdrew from their company, on the arrival of certain Jewish zealots, who came to him from James: and thus, for fear of their censure, he durst not keep company with men, whose fellowship he yet inwardly revered, and expected to enjoy in heaven. An error committed by a respectable character is infectious. Other Jews dissembled in a similar way:—even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation, and the truth of the Gospel was in danger of being forsaken on the authority of those, who had hitherto upheld its standard in the world. Such infirmities of the wise and good prove, beyond doubt, to whom alone we are obliged for the preservation of Christian truth in the earth. The Lord roused the spirit of Paul on the occasion: he vindicated the truth of the Gospel by an open and manly rebuke of Peter: and thus a seasonable check was put to the growing torrent of Pharisaism,—that dark but deadly foe of the Gospel,—which, in one form or another, is ever ready to cloud the light of truth, and to sap the foundation of Christian peace and life.

St. Paul's fourth visit to Jerusalem is but just mentioned in Scripture†. His fifth was attended with more memorable events. It was seen by the spirit of prophecy, that he would undergo bitter persecution from the infidel Jews; and the guarded kindness with which he was received by many, even of the believers there, formed no pleasing inducement to him to

* Gal. ii, 12.

† Acts, xviii. 22.

repeat his visits. But divine charity prevailed in St. Paul's mind over all objections, difficulties, and dangers: he rebuked his friends at Cæsarea, who dissuaded him from prosecuting his journey, by professing his readiness "not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus*." His resignation silenced them: they said, "the will of the Lord be done." On his arrival he went to James, and in the presence of all the elders, recounted the work of God among the Gentiles. They glorified the Lord, and rejoiced sincerely on the account: but at the same time they expressed what concern it gave them, to find how jealous of Paul the brethren were, having heard a false report of his teaching all the Jews to forsake the Mosaic observances. Doubtless he had not done this: but, he had done what displeased the Jewish zealots: he had insisted on the exemption of Gentiles from the yoke; and men, once out of humour, are disposed to hearken to malevolent exaggerations. In this exigency the advice of James was at the same time prudent and charitable, namely, that he should join with four men, who were bound by a Nazarite vow, in the customary services of the temple, till a sacrifice should be offered for each of them. With this Paul concurred; and thus he gave the clearest proof that he was ready to conform both to Jew and Gentile in things indifferent, with a view to promote the salvation of men. A few remarks, suggested by these transactions, shall close this chapter.

1. We see here that really there was no difference of sentiment between Paul and James in religious opinions, as, from a few expressions in the epistle of the latter†, some are glad to insinuate. These two Apostles, and indeed the whole college, were perfectly agreed in their views of the nature of the Gospel.

Paul and James agree in sentiment.

2. In Peter there evidently was, in one instance,

* Acts, xxi. 13.

† James, ii. latter part.

a duplicity of conduct with respect to the Mosaic rites, —in Paul a steady uniformity. He lived as a Jew himself: vows, synagogue-worship, and the various rites of the law he observed, not even sacrifices excepted, on occasion. He could not indeed look on them now in any other light than as branches of a human establishment; since the death of Christ had annulled their divine authority. The establishment itself he knew was soon to cease by the destruction of Jerusalem. To him and to the rest of the Apostles it appeared more charitable, to submit to the inconveniences of conformity, than to irritate the whole body of the Jews on account of circumstantialia. On this ground pious men in all ages have acted, and those, who have most excelled in Christian fruitfulness, have been most remarkable for their candour. At the same time the inflexible firmness of Paul in vindicating the doctrine of justification, by allowing on no account the circumcision of Gentiles, informs us where he laid the stress for salvation. This union of candour and firmness in the same person, acting variously in opposite circumstances, has led some writers to accuse him of inconsistency, who seem not to have understood the principles of the controversy. This was the case of Jerom of old. His controversy with Augustine on the subject is yet extant in the epistle of the latter, whose statement of the affair I think perfectly just; and it is agreeable to the views in which the conduct of the Apostle has now been exhibited.

3. We see here how infinitely important is the doctrine of justification! What excellent fruits it had brought forth* in the Jewish Church, now consisting of many thousands, has been shown. It appears how naturally the human heart departs from the faith of Christ before it is aware. The penetrating and zealous spirit of Paul was employed by the divine goodness to uphold still the standard of truth. Many, no

* Acts, xxi. 20.

doubt, received benefit from his example; but the glory of this Church was now on the decline.

4. The evil of bigotry is no less evident; and how naturally it connects itself with self-righteousness is also sufficiently apparent. An eager stress laid on any rite, or form, or external work whatever, easily thus degenerates. Steadfastness in the faith, and candour, and charity, are, under God, our preservatives against it.

There was little opportunity of trying on the minds of Christians, the effect of the charitable scheme, concerted between the two Apostles, because before the seven days were expired, the malice of the infidel Jews broke out against Paul. St. Luke's narrative, from the twenty-first chapter to the end of his history is spent on the consequences of this. The cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and piety of the Apostle Paul: the convincing force of his reasoning, which caused Felix to tremble, and Agrippa to confess himself almost a Christian: his preservation from Jewish malice by the privilege of Roman citizenship: the perils he underwent by sea and land, till he arrived a prisoner at Rome, and his labours for two years in the ministry among them who visited him in his imprisonment: these things are so circumstantially, and, I may justly add, so beautifully related by the sacred writer, that I shall refer my reader to him altogether, especially as neither the history of the mother-church, nor of any other particular churches, is connected with the account.

Paul was sent in bonds from Sidon by sea:

A. D.
62.

The malice of the Jews having failed of its object in Paul, by his appeal to Cæsar, would gladly have gratified itself on James. But he, though no Roman citizen, was shielded a little longer by the lenity of the Roman government*. His long residence at Jerusalem, where he was stationary for the most part,

* The first persecution of the Christians began about A. D. 64, the 11th year of the reign of the Emperor Nero. See page 34.

CHAP.

I.

A. D.

60.

had given him an opportunity, by a blameless life, to abate the prejudice of his unbelieving countrymen, and to extort the tribute of praise from the populace in general. About the year of our Lord sixty, he wrote his Catholic epistle. It is addressed to Jews in general; sometimes he speaks to Christians, sometimes to infidels, like a person well known, and of considerable influence among both. The covetousness, inhumanity, and persecuting spirit of the nation are described in strong colours; and he writes like one who foresees the speedy desolation which was to overtake them. By the practical turn of his doctrine, by his descanting on the vices of the tongue*, of partiality to the rich, and of contemptuous treatment of the poor in Christian assemblies†, and by his direction against vain swearing‡, it is but too evident, that the Church had considerably declined from its original purity and simplicity; and that the crafts of Satan, aided ever by human depravity, were wearing out apace the precious fruits of that effusion of the Spirit, which has been described. Such is the common course of things in all similar cases, within the like period of about thirty years. The Lord had not however forsaken his Church; though its members were in a persecuted state, and were brought before Jewish magistrates§, and vexed, so far as the rage of this infatuated nation had power to exert itself. He particularly exhorts them to patience under their trials, and a resignation to the Divine Will.

About the same time, or a little after, this Church was favoured with the Epistle to the Hebrews, which seems to have been written by St. Paul||.

As apostasy, partly through the fashionable and natural evil of self-righteousness, and partly through

* Chap. iii. † Chap. ii. ‡ Chap. v. § Chap. ii. 6.

|| St. Peter, in his second epistle to the Jews, reminds them of St. Paul's letter to them; which probably, could have been no other than this epistle.

OF JERUSALEM.

the cruelty of persecution, was the great mischief to be feared among them, he directs them particularly to maintain the Christian faith. St. Paul, in this Epistle, largely and distinctly shows the accomplishment of all the Mosaic types in Jesus. His priesthood, sacrifice, and intercession, are amply described. The privileges and benefits of his salvation are distinctly stated. He exhorts them to constancy in the simple faith of Christ. He urges them to persevere in supporting their Christian assemblies, from which some* had declined, probably through fear of persecution. He reminds them of the severities they had patiently undergone after their first illumination, of the compassion which his sufferings had excited among them, and of the cheerfulness with which they had sustained the spoiling of their goods, from the confidence they “had of having in heaven a better and enduring substance.” The whole turn of his exhortation shows, that they were in a state of grievous molestation at the time of writing this Epistle. And yet from their dullness in divine things, which he so warmly censures†, it is certain their spiritual taste had declined. The persecution of St. Paul at Jerusalem probably excited a general hostility against the Church. That it did not proceed to blood‡, seems owing to no other cause than the protection of the Roman government. The Apostle is particularly earnest in exhorting them to remember and hold fast the grace of the Gospel, which their first ministers had taught them, and to consider that Jesus Christ was their great object, and that a return to Jewish dependencies would ruin their souls. On the whole, we have here the most glorious views of the Gospel, and the most distinct information of the nature of a true adherence to it; though I see no evidence on the face of the Epistle for concluding, that he forbade them that same occasional and prudential compliance with Judaism in external obser-

* Heb. x. 25.

† Ib. v. 12.

‡ Ib. xii. 4.

vances, which all the Apostles practised. It was the departure of the HEART from the Lord Jesus, against which he warned them. He dwells not largely on particular duties. He had not lived much among them; and special details of practical matters came better from the pastoral pen of James.

Thus earnestly did these two Apostles instruct and warn a declining Church. But grace has its seasons! God will not always strive with man; yet the use of the Epistles will remain, till time shall be no more.

CHAP. II.

JUDEA AND GALILEE.

CHAP. II.

THE Holy Land was divided into three provinces, JUDEA, GALILEE, and SAMARIA. This last was in a situation so peculiar, as to deserve to be considered distinctly. And of the Churches of the two former I have not much more to say, than that their state, by fair analogy, may be estimated from that of the mother-church. Indeed a strong foundation had been laid for their conversion by the ministry of John the Baptist, and by that of our Lord in the days of his flesh. The angel Gabriel had foretold of the son of Zacharias, "that many of the children of Israel he should turn to the Lord their God*." Repentance was HIS theme, and by this he prepared the way of the Lord. Jesus himself condescended in his subordinate capacity of prophet and teacher to pursue the same method, though no regular churches were yet formed. He promised that the gift of the Holy Ghost should be vouchsafed to his disciples; and we have several intimations†, that a greater degree of success, of purity of knowledge, and of glory, should attend his religion after he

* Luke, i. 2.

† John, xiv. and xvi.

should leave this world, than during his personal ministry *.

Judea and Galilee being thus prepared for the Gospel, the blessed tidings began to be spread through them, and to be attended with rapid success, soon after the first persecution which arose concerning Stephen. Those, who had felt the flame of Divine Love in Jerusalem, being obliged to flee, preached through these regions, and, as we have seen, many thousands were converted. The mother-church, no doubt, was the most numerous, but various churches in the country must have contributed to make up the sum. The small size of Palestine may tempt some to wonder, how, if many thousands became Christians, the main body of the nation could yet remain in infidelity. The amazing populousness and fertility of the country accounts for this. The number of populous towns, in Galilee particularly, is astonishing, as appears from Josephus's narrative of the Jewish war. The single town of Gadara, near the lake of Gennezaret, by no means a town of the first magnitude, maintained two thousand swine†. If then the importance of regions be measured by the number of inhabitants, rather than by the extent of ground, this small country might vie perhaps with modern Russia.

Of these Churches the first instruments were not the Apostles themselves, though they doubtless visited them afterwards, and confirmed them. James the son of Zebedee would not confine his labours to Jerusalem, till the time of his martyrdom, no more than the rest of the twelve, if perhaps we except James the son of Alpheus, who was the first standing Pastor of Jerusalem.

* Let this account, once for all, for the much greater use which I make of the Acts and of the Epistles, than of the four Gospels. These last are indeed inestimable; but their uses are of another kind, and fall not so much within the plan of this Work.

† Mark, v. 15.

These Churches, most probably, followed the example of the parent-church, both in its first love and comfortable progress, and also in its unhappy declension. Peter's activity in establishing them was very conspicuous. "The Lord wrought effectually" in him always for the conversion of the Jews*. He passed through all quarters, and visited the places most remote from the capital, such as Lydda, Saron, and Joppa†. In all these places the Spirit of God accompanied his work. It was in this last city that the Lord by him raised Tabitha from the dead. I should scarcely have mentioned this miracle, in a work which professes all along to record the ordinary, not the extraordinary operations of the Holy Ghost, were not this woman distinguished by "her good works and alms-deeds which she did." All the widows stood by Peter weeping, and showing the "coats and garments which she had made, while she was with them." Thus had this woman's faith evidenced itself by good works; and the Spirit of piety and of prayer had gone hand in hand with that of industrious beneficence. Hail, Tabitha! thou hast the highest glory, and of the most solid kind, which is attainable on earth! But the reader sees how simple and low Christian exploits must appear in the eyes of worldly men. They are not like the swelling deeds of heroes and statesmen, which have hitherto, for the most part, monopolized the historic page. But the persons who are influenced by the Spirit of Christ like Tabitha, will yet know with whom they would wish to be numbered. The female sex, almost excluded from civil history, will appear perhaps more conspicuous in ecclesiastical. Less immersed in secular concerns, and less haughty and independent in spirit, they seem, in all ages, to have had their full proportion, or more than the other sex, of the grace of the Gospel.

* Gal. ii. 8.

† Acts, ix.

OF SAMARIA.

CHAP. III.

SAMARIA.

THIS country lay in the midst between Judea and Galilee, though distinguished from them both in its polity and religion. The inhabitants possessed a large part of the district, which had belonged to the ten tribes, whom the kings of Assyria had carried into captivity. These conquerors had filled their vacant place with various colonists*, who mixed the worship of Jehovah with their idols, vainly boasted of their relation to Jacob†, professed to regard the law of Moses, and despised or at least depreciated the rest of the Old Testament. Our Saviour clearly decides the contest, which for ages, had been carried on between them and the Jews, in favour of the latter‡. But though the Samaritan was an idolater in his very foundation, yet in moral practice he appears not worse than the Jew. Both, indeed, were at this time extremely corrupt, and gloried in cherishing an enmity, which forbade them the exercise of common humanity to one another.

The Divine Saviour pitied this people. He visited them himself§, and some sinners were thereby converted. He made a second attempt||; but the bigotry of the village to which he approached, prevented them from receiving him there, a circumstance which excited the fiery zeal of the two sons of Zebedee, and gave occasion to our Lord to say, “The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” He meekly bore the repulse, and went to another village. But the effusions of his kindness toward this unhappy people were now to appear in abundance.

Among the seven deacons, the next person to

* 2 Kings, xvii.

§ John, iv.

† John, v. 12.

‡ John, iv. 22.

|| Luke, ix. 52.

Stephen, in zeal and activity, was Philip. Driven from Jerusalem by the persecution, he was directed to go to the city of Samaria, perhaps to the same city called Sychar, where our Lord had conversed with the woman over Jacob's well. There he preached Christ, and the Gospel entered the hearts of many, so "that there was great joy in that city*." The inhabitants appear to have been a very ignorant simple people; but now that the Spirit of God was poured upon them, none received the Gospel with more cordial satisfaction. One effect immediately appeared, which indeed never fails to attend the hearty reception of the Gospel. Superstition and diabolical delusions vanished. A person, named Simon, had deceived this people with sorceries; I dare not say with pretended sorceries: We shall see sufficient proof, before we have done with the apostolical history, that sorcery was a real thing. For a long time they had been infatuated; but Philip's doctrine expelled their regard for these things, and numbers of both sexes were baptized. Simon himself, though a stranger to the nature and power of Christ's religion, was yet convinced, that Christianity in general was true; and this seems the just idea of a mere historical believer.

The Apostles hearing of the happy reception of the Gospel at Samaria, sent down Peter and John, who prayed on the behalf of the people, that the Holy Ghost might be imparted through the imposition of hands. The Spirit was communicated, not only in extraordinary gifts, but also in an effusion of the same holy graces, which had appeared in Judea. The former were those which only attracted the attention of Simon. His avaricious heart immediately conceiving the prospect of vast wealth to be acquired were he only once possessed of this supernatural power, he offered the Apostles a sum of money for the communication of the secret. Peter, who saw

* Acts, viii. 8.

distinctly both his covetousness and his ignorance, rebuked him in the severest manner, assured him that his heart was wrong altogether, and his state accursed, notwithstanding his baptism and profession of Christianity. At the same time he exhorted him to repent, and to seek the divine forgiveness. Here we see how singularly remote the religion of Jesus is from all worldly plans and schemes, and what an awful difference there ever is between a real and a nominal Christian. The conscience of Simon felt the reproof: he begged the Apostles prayers; but it does not appear that he prayed for himself. Peter and John preached through many Samaritan villages, and then returned to Jerusalem.

The Samaritans, a sort of half Jews,—for they were all circumcised,—being favoured with the same spiritual blessings as the rest, the minds of Christians were prepared to expect a similar extension of heavenly grace to uncircumcised idolaters. And among the wonders of divine love which we have reviewed, these are pleasing circumstances, that Jews and Samaritans, who, for ages, had disagreed in rites, should now be united in Jesus; and while each felt the same obligations to grace, should have learned mutual charity for the first time.

CHAP IV.

ETHIOPIA*.

It is instructive to observe, by what gentle degrees the goodness of God was preparing the way for the general diffusion of his grace in the world. The first Christians, even the Apostles themselves, were by no

* The Ethiopia to which this chapter is confined, seems to be that part of the country, whose metropolis is called Meroe, situated in a large island encompassed by the Nile and the rivers of Astapus and Astoborra: For in these parts (as the elder Pliny informs us) Queens had a long time governed under the title of Candace.—See Cave's Life of Philip.

means disposed to think with any particular compassion of Gentiles, and would scarcely have thought of spreading the Gospel beyond the bounds of their own nation, had not the persecution driven many out of Jerusalem. The teachers themselves needed to be taught of God in this part of their office. So helpless is man in divine things, even after he has been favoured with some spiritual light, that only by fresh communications, he can be induced to make any additional improvement. After Philip had finished his work at Samaria, he was by an extraordinary commission, ordered to travel southward toward the desert. He soon discovered the reason: he fell in with an Ethiopian eunuch, a minister of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who had been worshipping at Jerusalem, and was returning home in his chariot. Men, who feel the worth of their souls, will not be unemployed when alone. Their concern for their best interests will operate most powerfully, when they are most disengaged from business. The man was reading the prophet Esaias, and the adorable providence of God had directed him at that particular time to the fifty-third chapter, which gives so clear a description of Christ crucified. Philip asked him, if he understood what he was reading. The man confessing his ignorance, desired Philip to come and sit with him. The Evangelist took the opportunity of expounding to him the Gospel, from the passage he was then reading, which at once lays open the guilty and the miserable condition of mankind, their recovery only by the grace of Jesus Christ, the nature, end, and efficacy of his death and resurrection, and the doctrine of justification before God by the knowledge of the same Jesus and by his merits. The Ethiopian's mind had been prepared for the doctrine: he had been at the pains to attend Jewish instructions, the best then to be had in the world, except the Christian, which he now heard, for the first time; nor had the scandalous wickedness of the Jewish

nation hindered him from attending that worship, which he believed to be of divine origin. The ignorance of his own country suited not even the weakest and most glimmering light of a serious mind. His case is an encouragement for men, however ignorant and mistaken at present, to seek earnestly to God, for HE will take care that they shall FIND. The man felt himself guilty and wicked, and the views of the prophetic chapter before us, laid open by the preacher, discovered to him the remedy, which it pleased God so powerfully to apply to his heart, that as soon as they came to a certain water, he desired to be baptized. Philip assured him that there was no impediment, if he was sincere in the faith of Christ. On which he professed his belief, that the Jesus of Nazareth, whom Philip had preached to him, was indeed the Son of God prophesied of by Isaiah, and that he answered the character of Saviour there given to him. Philip then baptized the Ethiopian, who, though his instructor was, by the Spirit of the Lord, immediately taken from him, went on his way into his own country rejoicing*. Doubtless this joy had a solid and powerful cause; and if this case be compared with that of the three thousand first converts, and both of them with the doctrine of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, conversion will appear to be a spiritual internal work, humbling men for sin, and comforting them with forgiveness by Christ. The nominal profession, with which great numbers of persons content themselves, may seem to fit them for little else, than to disgrace Christianity by their practice.

It is impossible that the Ethiopian, thus powerfully enlightened and rejoicing in God, could be silent when he returned home. His influence and character would at least secure to him a respectful attention from some of his countrymen; and thus, the Gospel, most probably, was first planted in Ethiopia. But we have no more scripture-light on the subject.

* Acts, viii.

CHAP. V.

CÆSAREA.

CHAP.
V.

THE great mixture of Jews and Gentiles, in some of the extreme parts of the Holy Land or its neighbourhood, afforded a providential opportunity for the gradual illumination of the latter, for the abatement of Jewish bigotry, for the demonstration of Divine Grace in the salvation of all sorts of men, and for the union of Christian hearts. Thus we find that a Church was planted at Tyre, another at Ptolemais*, places which must have abounded with Gentiles. But Cæsarea affords the most remarkable instance of the observation just now made. It was the residence of the Roman Governor, and was so situated in the confines of Syria and Judea, that it was a matter of doubt to which region it ought to be assigned. And the final determination of this question in favour of the Syrians is mentioned by Josephus, as one of the immediate causes of the war, which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. This circumstance shows the great importance of this city, and the strong interest which both parties had in it.

Philip, after a laborious journey from Azotus, preaching in all the cities through which he passed, settled at length in Cæsarea. Here he was stationary for many years†. We find him, toward the conclusion of the period of about thirty years, which takes in the history of the Acts, still fixed in the same place, with four virgin daughters, where he entertained St. Paul in his last journey to Jerusalem. I can no more conceive Philip to have been idle and unfruitful all this time, than James to have been so at Jerusalem. A Church, mixed of Jews and Gentiles, would naturally be formed under so zealous a pastor, whose observation of the Grace of God in the case of the Eunuch, must have opened his mind to an affectionate reception of Gentile converts.

* Acts, xxi. † Acts, viii. 40. all compared with xxi. 8.

Indeed the abuse, which the malignant pride of the Jews had made of the Mosaic prohibition of intercourse with Gentiles, was a great bar to the extension of the Gospel. They refused to keep company with foreigners, and seem to have looked on them as devoted to destruction. The Apostles themselves were, as yet, under the power of similar bigotry, till a vision from heaven instructed Peter, as he was praying on the house-top at Joppa, that he ought not to call any man common or unclean*. By this he was prepared for the work which the Lord was immediately assigning him. The Holy Spirit suggested to him that three men were at that time inquiring for him, and directed him to go with them; “for I have sent them†.” Peter was soon informed by the men, that they had been sent to him from Cæsarea‡ by Cornelius, a Roman centurion there, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his family, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway; who had been warned from God by a holy angel to send for him.—Peter lodged the three men that night; two of them were household servants, and the third—rare character!—a devout soldier, who waited on the centurion continually.

Cornelius
sends for
Peter.

On the next day Peter went with them, but had the precaution to take with him six Jewish Christians

* Acts, x.

† The proper personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost, and the unlimited subjection due to him from Christian pastors, and, of course, from all Christians, are solidly deducible from this and various similar passages in the Acts of the Apostles.

‡ Much has been written concerning two sorts of Proselytes to the Jewish religion, circumcised ones, and incomplete ones, called Proselytes of the Gate. Two learned critics, Dr. Lardner and Dr. Doddridge, seem to have shown, however, that the latter had no existence. Cornelius was a Gentile altogether, and was treated as such by the Jews, though from his pious attention to the Jewish religion he must have been at least a Proselyte of the second sort, if any ever were so. In that case it seems difficult to conceive, why any Jew should have made such a difficulty of conversing with persons of this description.

from Joppa as witnesses of his proceedings. The following day they entered Cæsarea, and came into the house of Cornelius, who had called together his kinsmen and near friends, with that charity for their souls, which fails not to influence the minds of those, who have real charity for their own. On the entrance of Peter he falls down and worships. Peter corrects his mistaken devotion. Cornelius informs him, that having been particularly engaged in fasting and prayer, he was assured by an angel that his prayers and alms were acceptable to God, and that he had obeyed the divine direction in sending for him. Peter now preached the Gospel to the company, frankly owning, that he was at length fully convinced, that God was no respecter of persons ; but that he equally regarded Jew and Gentile, whoever the person was that “feared God, and wrought righteousness.” On this broad basis of encouragement, he was enabled to preach to them the good news of forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ, whose history they knew, though they did not understand the nature of his doctrine. He directed them now to receive that doctrine cordially for their peace with God. The perfect holiness and the supernatural works of Jesus, he observed, demonstrated him to be no impostor, but sent of God unquestionably : that he himself and the other Apostles were witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, and had received a commission from him to preach to the people, and to urge men’s acceptance of him here, if ever they expected to be welcomed by him, when he should judge the quick and dead at his second coming : and that all the prophets had testified, that whoever placed his confidence for salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, should receive remission of sins.

Where God himself powerfully operates on the mind, few words suffice. The whole company were converted to God. The Holy Ghost, both in an extraordinary and in an ordinary way, sealed the

Apostle's sermon. The Jewish brethren were astonished to find Gentiles put on an equal footing with Jews. Peter, after observing how unreasonable it would be to deny baptism to persons who had received the Holy Ghost no less than themselves, baptized the whole company; and at their desire spent a few days with them, to instruct them further in Christian principles; and then left them to the care of Philip, whose character at Cæsarea would probably from this time increase in public esteem.

A remark or two on this important transaction will be proper.

1. The Grace of God acts very variously in converting sinners. There are considerable shades of difference in the cases of Saul, of the Eunuch, and of Cornelius. The preaching of the Gospel found the first a determined enemy, the second an ignorant inquirer, the third a person already prepared by spiritual grace, though with no more than the Old Testament-light. But to all these different cases, the doctrine itself is the same: and the work of God in humbling man for his sins, and leading him to Christ alone for justification, is the same also.

2. How necessary is it, that the way of peace by Jesus Christ only be distinctly explained and understood! Cornelius, with an enlightened mind and a tender conscience, would never have found peace of conscience, unless he had understood the doctrine of forgiveness by the blood of the Redeemer. Imperfection still attending his best actions, he must have remained miserable in his spirit. The doctrine of forgiveness, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, brought him at once to a peace before unknown. How careful should we be to understand this doctrine aright! how zealous, in proportion to our ability, to transmit the precious jewel to posterity!

3. How narrow are the hearts of men! how circumscribed the charity even of the best! With difficulty even Christian Jews are brought to admit as

brethren the Gentile converts. Self-righteousness is natural to mankind. That God should receive as his children idolatrous Gentiles, as well as religious Jews, provokes the pride of narrow-minded selfish men, who have long been accustomed to consider themselves as the peculiar favourites of heaven.

CHAP. VI.

ANTIOCH AND SOME OTHER ASIATIC CHURCHES.

CHAP.
VI.

WE have not yet seen all the good effects which Providence brought out of Stephen's persecution. Though the Apostles thought it their duty to continue to water the flocks of Judea and Galilee, and to look on Jerusalem as a sort of central metropolis to them all, they encouraged the inferior pastors, who fled from the rage of persecution, to disseminate the Gospel in Gentile regions. Damascus, we have seen, reaped the benefit of this dispensation, and so did Tarsus. Some travelled as far as Phenice, Cyrus, and Antioch, still preaching only to Jews. At length certain Cypriot and Cyrenian Jews ventured to break through the pale of distinction : and at Antioch, the metropolis of Syria, they preached the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles. The Greek language here prevailed, and, on this account, the inhabitants were called Grecians*, being the descendants of a Macedonian colony, planted there by the successor of Alexander the Great. And now the Lord, willing to overcome effectually the reluctances of self-righteous bigotry, attended their ministry with remarkable success. The idolaters felt the renovating power of the Gospel, and in great numbers turned to the Lord. The mother-church hearing of this, sent Barnabas, whose piety and charity were renowned, to carry on and propagate a work, which required more labourers. His benevolent heart was feasted with the prospect ;

* Acts, xi. 20.

and the reality of salvation by the grace of Christ thus exemplified in persons, who had hitherto been involved in pagan darkness, was evidenced in a manner which, till then, had never been known. Finding many converts, he exhorted them to perseverance; and the addition of believers was still so large, that he began to look out for a coadjutor. He sought for Saul, who was then labouring at Tarsus perhaps with no great success: we are told of none at least; "for a prophet is not honoured in his own country;" and he brought him to Antioch. This populous city employed them a whole year. Here Christian societies were regularly formed, consisting, in a great measure, of Gentiles. And here the followers of Christ were first called Christians. It is not probable, that they would give themselves that name. The terms BRETHREN, ELECT, FAITHFUL, SAINTS, were the names which they would rather approve. The name of Christian seems to have been given by their adversaries. It is now a term of honour: at that time a more opprobrious one could scarcely be thought of by the learned and the polite. Were a man allowed to possess many good qualities; "but he is a Christian," would have been deemed more than a counterbalance to them all. And other terms invented by the malevolence of unregenerate men, in different ages, to stigmatize the same sort of persons, have produced, by the bare sound, similar effects on prejudiced minds.

A. D.
40.

The faith of the Antiochians was signally operative. Warmed with the love of Christ, and rejoicing in the prospect of heavenly treasures, they cheerfully contributed to the relief of the poor Christians in Judea, distressed by a famine. A large extension of Christ's kingdom in any place, naturally calls together a large number of pastors. It is pleasant indeed to labour among the faithful, encircled with sincere friends. It is not every real saint, who has the fortitude and charity to quit so agreeable

for the sake of breaking up fresh ground. How much longer these teachers would have remained at Antioch, if left to themselves, we know not. But the Holy Ghost now selected Barnabas and Saul for other labours. They obeyed the call; and Seleucia in the neighbourhood was their first destination. At this port they found a convenient passage to the fertile and voluptuous island of Cyprus. Methinks the evil spirits, who there supported the religious rites and the sensual practices of the devotees of Venus, began to tremble for this capital scene of their dominions.

From Salamis, the eastern point of the island, to Paphos the western, they spread the glad tidings of the Gospel. In this last place they found Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, in company with Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of the island, a man of sense and candour, who sent for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. The sorcerer endeavoured to prevent the good effects of their labours; till Paul, full of holy indignation at his diabolical malice, was enabled miraculously to strike him blind for a season. Sergius was astonished, we are told, “at the DOCTRINE” of the Lord*, and commenced a Christian from that hour.

The two Apostles sailed now to the adjoining continent, and arrived at Perga in Pamphylia. And here John Mark, who had thus far attended them as minister, left them and returned to Jerusalem. It was, perhaps, more agreeable to him to profess and practise Christianity at home with his mother and friends, than to expose himself to heathens. Even then, traces of the love of the world were to be seen among Christians †.

* Acts, xiii. 12. The expression is remarkable, but has a peculiar propriety. A mere historical believer would have been astonished at the miracle merely. Sergius, a true convert, who entered into the holy nature of the Gospel by a spiritual perception, is astonished “at the doctrine.”

† Perhaps we are not sufficiently acquainted with the circumstances of the case, to form a fair judgment how far the conduct of John Mark is to be justified.

Pisidia, lying to the north of Pamphylia, was the next scene. Here was another Antioch; and the Apostles on the Sabbath-day attended the Jewish synagogue. After the usual reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers gave them a friendly invitation to exhort the people, which Paul embraced with his usual zeal. His sermon is much of the same strain with those of Peter, and of Stephen, tending to beget in the hearers a conviction of sinfulness, and to give testimony to Jesus, concluding with a remarkably plain declaration of the grand doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus only, and a solemn warning against the dreadful consequences of hardness of heart, and of contempt of the Divine message. The Gentiles, powerfully impressed with the new doctrine, desired to hear more of the subject the next Sabbath. Many Jews and proselytes were converted; and almost the whole city came on the next Sabbath-day to hear*. The sight was too much for the envy of the infidel Jews, who opposed Paul with all their might. The two Apostles boldly assured them, that though it was their duty to carry the news of salvation to the Jews first, yet as they despised God's Gift of Eternal Life, it would now be offered to the Gentiles, agreeably to the glorious prophecy of Isaiah†, where the experimental influence of the Gospel on Gentile hearts is clearly described. The Pagans, not so proud as the Jews, felt that they had no righteousness to plead before God, thankfully embraced the Gospel, and believed in great numbers.

Pisidia was now full of the Gospel; and the Apostles proceeded with vast success, till a persecution, stirred up by the Jews, induced some self-righteous women of rank, in conjunction with the magistrates, to drive them out of their coasts. From thence they came to Iconium, the northern extremity of the country; and the disciples whom they left, though harassed with persecution, were yet "filled

* Acts, xiii. 44.

† 49th Chap.

with Joy and the Holy Ghost.” The internal consolation of their religion supported their souls. In Iconium the two Apostles continued a long time, and delivered the message of Divine Reconciliation with much freedom and energy, to the conversion of a great multitude both of Jews and Gentiles. The unbelieving Jews* exerted their usual malevolence, and filled the Gentiles with the strongest prejudices against the Christians. In truth, their conduct, though by no means uncommon, affords a dreadful instance of human depravity. It cannot be denied, that those Jews must in religious knowledge have far exceeded the idolatrous inhabitants of Iconium. They held the Unity of the Godhead; they worshipped him in their synagogue; they heard his precepts from Sabbath to Sabbath out of the law of Moses and the prophets. They must have known thus far, that the Messiah was foretold in the latter, and they could not but be acquainted with their duty both to God and man in many respects by means of the former. Yet so unreasonable are they, as to labour to prevent their pagan neighbours from being instructed in any thing that deserved the name of religion, and to persecute with unceasing acrimony two of their own countrymen, who agreed with them in the profession of the worship of the one living and true God. Of so little influence is what some call the “Unitarian” religion, if it be UNCONNECTED with the Knowledge and Love of Jesus Christ. Persons, who make THAT the whole of their religion, can, it seems, rather see mankind remain buried in the depths of the most senseless idolatry in worship, and of vicious profligacy in life, than brought over to the real Christian religion, to the hearty renunciation of their own righteousness, and to a humble dependence on the atoning blood of Jesus! The preaching of Paul and Barnabas excited a variety of speculations in this city. The Gentiles were divided; and part ranged themselves with the

* Acts, xiv.

Jews, and part with the Apostles. But the former had the advantage for the present, because they had the arms—which Christian soldiers cannot use—of violence and persecution.

The Apostles, aware of their designs, fled into Lycaonia, a country to the east of Pisidia; and there preached the Gospel, particularly in Lystra and Derbe. In the former of these places, a poor cripple, who never had had the use of his feet, heard Paul with the most respectful attention, and was so far wrought upon already in his mind, as to believe that there was virtue in the name of Jesus Christ to heal him. To confirm him in his yet infant views of the Christian religion, to attest the truth, and to convince men that Jesus was both able and willing to SAVE, Paul was enabled by a word to restore the man to the full use of his limbs. Immediately these poor idolaters concluded, that the gods were come down to them in the likeness of men. Through this whole country of Asia Minor, the Greek literature, and with it the numerous fables of Hellenistic vanity, abounded. They had heard of Jupiter and Mercury particularly as visiting mankind; and now Barnabas, as the elder perhaps, and more majestic figure of the two, must, they conceived, be Jupiter; and Paul, as the more eloquent speaker, must be Mercury, the classical god of eloquence. The priest of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and, together with the people, would have done sacrifice to the Apostles. It was a grievous circumstance; but our grief and regret is mitigated, when we reflect that one of the finest opportunities was given to Paul and Barnabas of demonstrating the spirit of real godliness. However pleasing it might be to corrupt nature to receive the idolatrous* homage of a deluded people,

* The historical reader can scarcely fail to contrast with this behaviour of the Apostles the ambitious arts of Jesuit missionaries, and to regret the want of a similar piety and integrity in a late celebrated naval commander in a scene of ~~the same~~ kind, which happened a little before his lamentable death.

nothing could be more abhorrent from the nature of the Gospel itself, and from the humble character of its teachers. They could not bear the sight: they rent their clothes; and ran in among the people, and expostulated with them on the absurdity of their conduct; assuring them that they were no more than frail men like themselves, and that their intention in preaching to them was, to turn them from these vanities to the living God, who formerly indeed had left all nations to follow their own ways, but now had sent his servants to preach a method of salvation from such idolatries. Not that the worship of false gods was excusable; the constant benefits of Providence calling for thankfulness, and pointing out the Supreme Creator to the consciences of men. Thus faithfully did they preach conviction of sin to the Lycaonians, and with difficulty prevent the actual performance of the sacrifice, which would have given them more pain than the persecution that followed.

The fickle multitude, who had so recently been even idolatrously attached to Paul and Barnabas, were soon persuaded by some Jews, who came from Antioch and Iconium, to harbour the worst opinion of them; and, doubtless, the dislike of secular glory, which these excellent Apostles, with a truly Christian spirit, showed on all occasions, would not a little contribute to increase this alienation of mind. In a tumult Paul was stoned, and dragged out of the city, as a dead corpse; and while the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city, miraculously restored, as it seems: and he departed the next day with Barnabas to Derbe. There many were converted; and the persecuting spirit intermitting, they visited again, in circuit, the regions of Pisidia and Lycaonia, encouraging the disciples to persevere in the faith of Jesus in confidence of divine support, and in full expectation of the kingdom of heaven, into which real Christians must not expect to enter without much tribulation.

They now ordained some of the brethren to minister in every Church, and devoutly recommended both pastors and flocks to the care of that gracious Lord on whom they believed: Solemn fasting and prayer were used on this occasion. Returning through Pamphylia, they preached again at Perga, and from Attalia sailed to the great Antioch, whence they had been, by the prayers of the Church, recommended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled.

Here they remained a considerable time previous to their attendance at the Council of Jerusalem, after which they returned to the same Church in company with Judas and Silas, who, with authority from the mother-church, confirmed them in the liberty of the Gospel, in conjunction with many other teachers. The Christians of Antioch walked now in genuine consolation, and while they dared to rest on Christ alone, they practised good works in a filial spirit. Thankful for the assistance of Judas and Silas, they dismissed them to the Apostles who had sent them*. Silas, however, loved his situation, and remained in the service of the Gentiles.

Some days after, Paul proposed to Barnabas a second circuitous visit of the Asiatic Churches. Barnabas, fond of Mark his nephew, proposed to take him with him. Paul, remembering his former desertion, thought him unfit for the work. On which side there was more blame in this contest, may be hard to determine. Probably both were too positive; but to us at this distance of time Paul's view of the question seems the most just. The consequence was a separation between these two Christian leaders; and it does not appear that they ever saw one another afterwards, though it ought not to be doubted, but that, on the whole, their mutual esteem and regard continued: the best men are but men. The progress of the Gospel was not, however, re-

Contest
between
Paul and
Barnabas.

* Acts, xv. 33.

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Barnabas sailed with Mark to Cyprus, and here he is dismissed from the sacred memoirs. Paul took with him Silas, having the recommendation of the brethren to the Grace of God, which would lead one to conclude, that the Antiochians preferred his cause to that of Barnabas. He now went through Syria and Silicia, confirming the Churches.

In Lyaconia, he found the pious Timothy, whom he took as an associate, and confirmed the Gentile converts every where in Christian Liberty: Thus the Churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

CHAP. VII.

GALATIA.

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THE Love of God, where it rules in an ardent degree, is insatiable. The Apostle's heart is not content with the trophies already erected in many parts of Asia Minor. As the miser thinks no acquisitions great, while any prospects of farther gain are still open to his view, so Paul could not with complacency rest in the attainments already made, while so much ground still lay before him, to the north and to the west, in the hands of Satan. He travelled throughout Phrygia and Galatia*. The plantation of the Churches in the former country will afterwards engage our attention; the later, whose history in point of time is much sooner concluded in sacred story, will be now most conveniently exhibited. The epistle written to that Church affords us almost the only materials we have; but little as they are, they are inestimable. I am entirely convinced by Dr. Lardner†, that this was an early epistle, and by no means dated from Rome, as the subscription at the end of the epistle intimates. Nor is this the only place in which those subscriptions, which the un-

* Acts, xvi. 6.

† See his Supplement.

learned reader should know make no part of the Apostolical writings, deceive us.

The people of this country received the Gospel in great numbers, insomuch that several Churches were planted through the district. They understood St. Paul's doctrine, and received it in its true sense, namely, that justification before God is attainable only by faith in Christ crucified. He clearly laid before them the riches of Divine Grace. And they had so deep an impression of the truths, which he taught, and felt so much of their energy, that they seemed as it were to see the Son of God crucified among them*: they received the promised Spirit of adoption, by which they rejoiced in God as their Father†, and they cheerfully suffered much persecution for the name of Christ‡. Before this, they had lived in the darkest idolatry; for these Churches were formed almost, if not entirely, of Gentiles§. The true God was made known to them, and Unitarianism, of itself unable to emancipate men from sin, as the case of the Jews evinced, was with them attended with the distinct knowledge and lively faith of Jesus.

What proves the divine taste of this people was, that no disadvantage in the circumstances of the delivery of the Gospel operated with them to its prejudice. Some remarkable infirmity this great man was afflicted with;—what it was precisely we are nowhere told;—but it presented something contemptible in the eyes of profane persons. And it is no small proof of the Galatians being much humbled and awakened in their minds by the Spirit of God, and this circumstance lessened not at all their regard to the Apostle or to his message. “They received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus||.” They confessed the blessedness, which they felt on account of the Gospel, and were ready to give even the most painful proofs of their affection to him. In

* Galat. iii. 1. † iv. 6. ‡ iii. iv. § iv. 8.

all this we see, what the Gospel is, what it does for men who truly understand and embrace it in an humbled heart, what was St. Paul's manner of preaching, and how different a thing Christianity then appeared from the frigid speculations which in modern times bear that name.

But soon after Paul had left them with the most pleasing hopes of their spiritual growth, he was astonished to hear of a change for the worse, which took place among them. Some Jews, who were either their own countrymen, or who had lately arrived at Galatia from other parts of Asia Minor where Paul had laboured, took pains to pervert them. They made no attempts indeed to unsettle their minds in the views of the unity of the Godhead, and the principal facts of Christianity; nor did they endeavour to draw them back to the worship of idols. They neither formally denied the atonement of Christ, nor persuaded the people to desist from Christian worship. Yet was it another gospel, though it deserved not the name of Gospel *, to the love of which they seduced them. They assured them, that they could not be saved without circumcision, and prevailed on them to JUDAIZE so far, as to observe the rites of Moses in various instances †. They took pains to estrange them from Paul, and to draw them over to themselves, and to a worldly spirit of conformity, loving to appear fair in the eyes of men, and pretending to be zealous for good works, while their real view was to avoid the persecution, which attended the Cross of Christ ‡. To give the better effect to their insinuations, they instilled into them disrespectful ideas of Paul as though he were far inferior to the other Apostles: and as it seems, they represented the mother-church of Jerusalem, with the college of Apostles there, as coinciding with themselves in doctrine.

Thus the self-righteous poison, which first issued

* Chap. i. 6, 7.

† iv. 10

‡ vi. 12.

from Jerusalem, was brought into this distant province, where the ignorance and simplicity of the people, unacquainted with Jewish modes and habits, gave it the freest room to operate. These false teachers still called themselves Christians, and the mischief which they introduced, may be deemed at first sight no great one. So, I doubt not, some fashionable perversions of Evangelical truth at this day, of a similar kind, appear to many to be of no great consequence. I am not, however, to disguise that this Galatian delusion appears strongly to resemble the perversions to which I allude. I have represented things as they appear to me from the epistle. The great evil lurking under all this art and zeal was the adulteration of the faith of Jesus, the sole Author of our salvation. In no epistle does the Apostle speak so sharply, or express himself so vehemently. His exhortation and rebuke came warm from a charitable heart, just after the reception of the disagreeable tidings. He professes himself astonished at the defection of the Galatians from Christ; and execrates any man or even angel, who should preach any other way of salvation. If such a person still call himself a Christian, and hold the historical facts of the Gospel, the case is not altered for the better; the deception only passing more current on that account*. He asserts, that if they mixed circumcision, or any work of the law, with Christ in the article of justification, Christ would be of no effect to them†. He must be their whole Saviour, or he would profit them nothing; law and grace in this case being quite opposite. He marks the mere worldly nature of the doctrine they were embracing‡: it would make them bigotted Jews indeed, proud, self-righteous, void of the love of God and man§, and no better in their spiritual state than they were while idolaters||. Thus they would

* Chap. i.
§ Chap. v.

† Chap. v.

‡ Chap. vi. towards the
|| iv. 9.

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lose all the liberty of the Gospel, and be mere slaves in religion, like all unconverted persons, who in reality are self-righteous, and devoid of holy principle. He points out to them the peculiar nature of the Gospel, as perfectly distinct from any thing that man in his depraved state is apt to teach or ready to embrace. In the historical part of the epistle he vindicates his own Apostolical character, inculcates throughout, in all possible variety of language, and with his usual copiousness both of clear argument and strong diction, the all-important article of justification, and presses the necessity of continuing in it, in order to be benefited by it. Otherwise we make Christ the minister of sin, or of condemnation: we build again what we have destroyed; and, as far as in us lies, make him to have died in vain. He appeals to their own experience of the happy fruits of the Gospel, which they had felt internally, and represents himself as travailing in birth for them, till Christ be formed in them. He expresses himself dubious of their condition, and desirous of visiting them, that he might adapt his language to their perilous situation. He wishes that their evil advisers were cut off, so mischievous were they to souls; and assures them, that the Divine Vengeance would overtake those that troubled them. He informs them, that the persecution, which he himself endured, was on account of this very doctrine. This it was that stirred up the enmity of the human heart; and this doctrine being lost, the Gospel becomes a mere name, and Christianity is lost in the group of common religions.

It will be proper for us to bear in mind the Apostle's reasonings on this subject, and to apply them to every period of Church-history; since it is evident, that the rise or fall of this great Christian article, must determine the vigour or decline of true religion in all ages. He neglects not however to inculcate in his usual manner the necessity of good

works, as the just fruits and evidences of a real Christian state^{*}; and he particularly encourages them to works of mercy, attended with a patient and cheerful prospect into eternity, and animated with genuine charity †.

There is reason to hope, that the best effects were produced by the epistle. No very long time after, the Apostle again visited these Churches, and went over the whole country, strengthening “all the disciples ‡.” This is the substance of what I can collect from Scripture concerning the history of this Church,—except a single hint in another epistle §, in which he recommends to the Corinthians to use the same plan for the relief of the poor saints, which he had suggested to the Galatians. From the influence which he hence appears to have had in Galatia, it is probable, that the Judaical perversion was overcome.

CHAP. VIII.

PHILIPPI.

THE dispensation of the Gospel is doubtless the greatest blessing that can be vouchsafed to any country. But the times and the seasons God hath reserved to himself. Even in this sense salvation is of grace; and Divine Providence alone orders and appoints, that the Gospel shall be preached here or there, as he pleases. Paul and Silas, if left to themselves, in their progress to the west, would have evangelized Pergamus or Asia propria and Bithynia ||, but were prevented by special intimations of the Holy Spirit. They came now to Troas,—so called from its being the place, or near the place, where old Troy had stood by the sea-coast,—uncertain, whither they should go next, and perhaps little apprehensive that

* Chap. v. toward the end. † Chap. vi. ‡ Acts,
§ 1 Cor. xvi. 1. || Acts, xvi. 7.

God, now for the first time was introducing his Gospel into Europe. A nightly vision, in which a Macedonian intreated Paul to come over into his country and help them, determined at once their destination. They sailed from Troas to the island of Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, a Macedonian sea-port, whence, through the gulf of Strymon, they came to Philippi, the first city of that part of Macedonia, which they would meet with in their way from Neapolis. So I understand St. Luke's expression *Περὶ τῆς*; for Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. The city of Philippi, though originally Macedonian, and so named from Philip the father of Alexander, was then a Roman colony, inhabited by Roman citizens, and regulated by Roman laws and customs. The region in which it stood, had been renowned for constituting the third of the four great monarchies under the arms of Alexander, and the place itself had been, something more than half a century ago, the scene of a famous battle, between two Roman parties engaged in a civil war. Neither of THOSE seasons would have been at all convenient for the Gospel. The present was a scene of tranquillity and order under the Roman government: and Macedonia, though now only a Roman province, was going to be the subject of transactions infinitely more noble than those which adorn the history of its greatest princes.

The appearances on their arrival did not promise any thing remarkable. They spent a few days at first with little prospect of success. They found a few Jews there, who used on the Sabbath day to frequent an oratory out of the city by the river side: and some women, religiously disposed, resorted thither. It was the constant method of the Apostles to join themselves to Unitarians, wherever they could find them, as the first opening for the Gospel of Christ. They did so on this occasion, and spake to the women. One of them was Lydia, a person of some property.

Her heart the Lord opened, that “ she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul.” She was baptized with her family ; and with affectionate importunity she prevailed on the Apostle and his companions to make her house their home in Philippi. Here we have the beginnings of the Philippian Church ; but the conversion was sound and stable, and the progress of Lydia in the divine life seems of the same kind as that of Cornelius. Vexed at the prospect, Satan employed a young woman possessed with a spirit of Python to bring the Gospel into contempt if possible. She constantly followed the Christian preachers, and bore them the most honourable testimony. Paul was grieved, as being fully sensible of the ill effect, which a supposed union between Christ and Python* must occasion in the minds of men. He was at length enabled miraculously to eject the demon. The proprietors of the young woman, who had made a traffic of her oracular powers, finding that she was dispossessed of the demon, wreaked their vengeance on Paul and Silas, and by slanderous accusations induced the magistrates to scourge them severely, and to commit them to prison. The jailer thrust them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.

In this situation, distressing indeed, and in the eyes of many contemptible, these two servants of God, at midnight, though oppressed with pain and hunger and every disagreeable circumstance, were yet enabled to pray and sing praises to God. So powerful are the consolations of the Holy Ghost and so much did the love of Christ constrain them ! And now the Lord caused a great earthquake, which opened all the doors of the prison, and loosed every one’s bonds. The jailer awaking, in his first tre-

* The very term leads me to apprehend, that the oracular work of the Pythian Apollo among the pagans had something diabolical in it ; and the story before us demonstrates the fallacy of such delusions, and that human fraud and sagacity are not sufficient to account for them.

pidation, by a practice which I wish had been creditable among pagans only, was about to destroy himself. Paul kindly assured him that none of the prisoners had escaped. And now being struck with horror at the thought of the world to come, to which he had been hastening in all his guilt, and being divinely convinced of his danger, he came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and asked what he must do to be saved. The answer was plain and direct. Why do any persons who call themselves Christian ministers ever give any other? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." They then instructed him and his household in the nature of the Gospel, and opened to him the doctrine of forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ. His conversion appears evidently of the same kind, as that of the three thousand at Jerusalem. He was humbled for his sins, and he received pardon by faith in Jesus. His ready submission to baptism, his affectionate treatment of those, who had just before been the objects of his severity, and his joy in the Lord, demonstrated, that he was turned from Satan to God.—His whole family shared with him in the same blessings.

In the morning the magistrates sent an order for the dismissal of the prisoners. But Paul thought it not inconsistent with Christian meekness, to demand from them an apology for their illegal behaviour to Roman citizens; for such it seems Silas was, as well as Paul. The magistrates, alarmed, came personally to make concessions, which were easily accepted. Being dismissed from prison, they entered into Lydia's house, comforted the disciples, and left Philippi for the present.

Some years after, the Apostle again visited the Philippians, and found them still in a flourishing state. He always took a peculiar pleasure in this Church; and, in his epistle written from Rome, he thanks God for their sincere fellowship in the Gospel from

the beginning. He expresses his expectation of liberty, and of being enabled to see them again, and exhorts them to bear patiently the persecutions to which they were exposed, as being an evidence of the divine favour*.

Liberality was a shining virtue among these converts. They had sent once and again to his relief at Thessalonica†. And now they had sent Epaphroditus to Rome, to minister to his wants. A dangerous illness had brought that disciple to the borders of the grave. Upon his recovery he was afflicted to think of the distress, which the news of his sickness must have brought on the minds of the Philippians. Paul was therefore the more anxious to send him back. The sensibility of that love, with which the Holy Ghost had influenced all concerned in this affair, is finely described in this part of the epistle‡. The Apostle, toward the close of it, even exults in the pleasure which the charity of these disciples gave him; and he assures them, that his God would “supply all their need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” He warns them however against the dangers of seduction. Judaizing teachers desired to pervert them. He reminds them, therefore§, of his own simple dependence on the Lord Jesus, though he had fairer pretensions than most men to self-righteousness; and with tears in his eyes declares, that, even then, many pretended Christians walked like enemies of the Cross of Christ.

Such was the work of God at Philippi. A considerable number of persons, once worshippers of idols, devoted to the basest lusts, and sunk in the grossest ignorance, were brought to the knowledge and love of the true God, and to the hope of salvation by his Son Jesus. In this faith and hope they persevered amidst a world of persecutions, steadily brought forth the fruits of charity, and lived in the joyful expectation of a blessed resurrection.

* Philip. i. 28, 29.

† Chap. ii. toward the end.

‡ Philip. iv. 10

§ Chap. iii.

CHAP. IX.

THESSALONICA.

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OF Amphipolis and Apollonia, the next cities of Macedonia through which St. Paul passed, nothing particular is recorded. But at Thessalonica another European Church was formed inferior in solid piety to none in the primitive times. This city had been rebuilt by Philip of Macedon, and had its name from his conquest of Thessaly. Here Paul followed his usual practice of preaching first to the Jews in their synagogue; and he spent the first three Sabbaths in pointing out the evidences of Christianity. The custom of the Jews in allowing any of their countrymen to exhort in their synagogues, gave the Apostle an easy opportunity of preaching to this people, till their accustomed enmity and obstinacy began to exert itself. Some of the Jews were however converted*, and a great multitude of religious Gentiles who used to attend the synagogue, and not a few females of quality. So difficult is it for even Satan himself to erase all perception of the one true God from the minds of men, so powerful is the voice of natural conscience, and so totally unreasonable is the polytheism of the pagans, that notwithstanding the extreme depravity of human nature, we find, wherever the Jews carried on the public worship of the God of Israel, it was common for some Gentiles to join in their worship. Within the bounds of the Holy Land there were a number of this sort. And I observe through the whole tenour of Josephus's history, that the Romans treated with respect what the Jews held sacred; and whoever was distinguished by any religious thoughtfulness from others, such a one found nothing to suit him in Gentile rites, but preferred the worship of the Jews. The devout Greeks converted at Thessalonica were of this class; and this is not the first

* Acts, xvii.

instance we have seen of the Lord's preparing persons, by an attention to a more imperfect light, for the Sun of Righteousness. But HE is not confined to one method. The major part of the Thessalonian converts were idolaters*, who now turned to the living and true God, in the faith and hope of Jesus, who "delivered them from the wrath to come." Faith, hope, and charity evinced this people to be God's elect: the word came to their hearts in much power and assurance; and, though it exposed them to great affliction, this did not prevent their joy of the Holy Ghost.

The restless Jews were not ashamed to join with the most profligate pagans in persecuting the new converts; and decent hypocrites and open sinners were, once more, seen united in opposing the Church of God. They assaulted the house of Jason, at whose house Paul and his companions were entertained. Precautions having been used to secrete them, Jason and some other Christians were brought before the magistrates, and calumniated with the usual charge of sedition. The Roman governors, however, were content with exacting a security from Jason and his friends for the peace of the state. But the Apostle knew too well the malice of the Jews to confide in any present appearances of their moderation; and therefore felt himself obliged abruptly to leave the infant Church. The first epistle, however, which he sent to them, not long after, plainly proves that they were not without pastors, whom he charges them to honour and obey†.

The growth of this people in godliness was soon renowned through the Christian world. Their persecution appears to have been grievous; and hence the comfort of God their Saviour, and the prospect of the invisible world, became more precious to them. The Apostle made two attempts to return to them, but was as often disappointed by the malice of the Jews.

* 1 Thess. i. 9.

† 1 Thess. v.

† 1 Thess.

Fearing, lest the weight of affliction might crush their religion in its infancy, he sent Timothy to them, to establish and comfort them. From* him, on his return, he learnt the strength of their faith and love, and their affectionate remembrance of the Apostle, whose benevolent effusions of joy and gratitude on the occasion exceed all encomium. The influence of the Holy Spirit in enlightening, comforting, and invigorating this Church, seemed in a good measure to supply any want of pastoral instruction, in which, from their circumstances, they might probably be defective. They were taught of God to love one another, and they exercised this brotherly affection in the strongest manner toward all around†.

Fornication indeed was a sin so commonly practised among the Gentiles, without the least suspicion of its evil, that Paul thought proper to warn them against it expressly and distinctly‡.

In his second epistle he congratulates them on their great proficiency in faith and love: and, while he comforts them with the prospect of the second coming of Christ, he takes occasion to correct a mistake, into which they had fallen from what he had mentioned in his former epistle, of imagining that the last day was at hand. Men, who had suddenly passed from the grossest ignorance, into the full blaze of Gospel-day, might easily make such a mistake, especially since their affections were now so strongly captivated with heavenly objects, and since they found so little in a world of persecution to cheer their minds. There appears only one fault in this people which he thought necessary to rebuke. He intimated something§ of it in the former epistle, in the latter he was more express||. It was the want of industry in their callings, with which he charged some of them; for this was not a general evil. How they might fall into it, is easy to conceive. Persons all

* 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10.

† iv. 9, 10.

‡ iv. 3—9.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 11, 12.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 11.

alive for God and his Christ, and knowing little of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the crafts of Satan, might find it irksome to attend to the concerns of this life. It was a fault indeed, and very dangerous, if persisted in; but as it was, in all probability, soon corrected, and in part occasioned by the strength of heavenly affections, one cannot be very severe in censuring them.

It may be worth while for those, who feel themselves much irritated against similar evils attendant on the effusion of the Holy Spirit in our days, to consider whether they do not exercise more candour toward the Thessalonians, than they do toward those, who are actually walking in their steps; whether they are not apt to respect the former as real Christians, and to scorn the latter as deluded enthusiasts!

This Church bears the strongest signatures of godliness, the effect of no common effusion of the Spirit. They adorned the Gospel, with faith, hope, and charity; yet showed, by their faults and ignorance, the importance of diligent and much pastoral instruction, in which their circumstances suffered them not to abound; and which, under God, would have soon cured the former, and removed the latter. They were exposed to such blemishes, as are most apt to attend great attainments in the divine life made with vast rapidity.

It appears, that St. Paul visited this people a considerable time after, and gave them much exhortation; but we have no particular further account of them*.

* In the first epistle he "charges them by the Lord," that it be "read to all the holy brethren." As this seems to have been his first epistle, and indeed the newest part of the whole New Testament, the solemnity of the abjuration (*ορκισμός*) has a peculiar propriety, as Dr. Lardner observes. The Thessalonians were no doubt disposed to receive it as matter of apostolical inspiration, and the importance of bringing every Christian to be well-acquainted with the word of God is fairly im-

CHAP. X.

BEREA AND ATHENS.

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PAUL was conducted from Thessalonica to Berea, a city of Macedonia. Here also was a Jewish synagogue, and here, for the first time, the preaching of the Cross was candidly received by Jews. A very singular character is given of the Jews of this place;—they possessed a liberality of mind, which disposed them to listen with attention, and to search the Scriptures of the Old Testament with daily assiduity. The grace of God seems to have prepared these persons for the Gospel; and Paul had the pleasure to find a number of the stamp of Cornelius, who were groping their way to happiness, and were ready to hail the light as soon as it should dawn upon them. Many Jews of Berea believed, and not a few Gentiles also of both sexes: those of the female sex were persons of quality. The rage of the Thessalonian Jews soon however disturbed this pleasing scene, and stirred up a persecution, which obliged the Christians to use some art in saving the Apostle's life. His conductors at first took the road toward the sea, which might lead the persecutors to suppose he had quitted the continent. They then brought him safe to Athens*, once the first city of Greece in all views, and still renowned for taste and science, the school in which the greatest Romans studied philosophy. Here, while he waited for the arrival of Silas and Timothy, he beheld the monuments of the city with other eyes than those of a scholar and a gentleman. No place in the world could more have entertained a curious and philosophical spirit than this. Temples, altars, statues, historical memorials, living philosophers of various sects, books of those who were deceased, a confluence of polite

* Acts, xvii.

and humanized persons of various countries, enjoying the luxury of learned leisure,—these things must at once have obtruded themselves on his notice : and no man in any age, by strength of understanding, warmth of temper, and justness of taste, seems to have been more capable of entering into the spirit of such scenes than Saul of Tarsus. But Divine Grace had given his faculties a very different direction ; and the Christian in him predominated extremely above the philosopher and the critic. He saw here, that even the excess of learning brought men no nearer to God. No place on earth was more given to idolatry. He could not therefore find pleasure in the classical luxuries presented before him : he saw his Maker disgraced, and souls perishing in sin. Pity and indignation swallowed up all other emotions : and ministers of Christ, by their own sensations in similar scenes, may try how far they are possessed of the mind of Paul, which, in this case, certainly was the mind of Christ. If affections be lively, some exertions will follow. He laid open the reasons of Christianity to Jews in their synagogue, also to Gentile worshippers, who attended the synagogue, and, daily, to any persons whom he met with in the forum. There were two sects very opposite to one another among the pagan philosophers, namely, the Epicureans and the Stoics. The former placed the chief good in pleasure, the latter in, what they called, virtue, correspondent to the two chief sects among the Jews, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and indeed to the two sorts among mankind in all ages, who yet are in a state of nature, namely, men of a licentious and dissipated turn of mind on the one hand, and on the other self-righteous persons who substitute their own reason and virtue in the room of divine grace and divine influence. As these will in any age unite against the real friends of Jesus Christ, so it was here : the Apostle appeared a babbler in their eyes. Jesus and the resurre

which he preached, were ideas, from which their minds were so abhorrent, that they took them for a new god and goddess.

It belonged to the court of Areopagus to take cognizance of things of this nature. This court had unjustly condemned the famous Socrates, as if he had depreciated the established religion, though he had given as strong proofs of his polytheistic attachments as he had of philosophical pride. It ought not however to be denied, that in a lower sense he suffered for righteousness sake. His honest rebukes of vice and improbity exposed him to death;—so unsafe is even the least approximation to goodness in a world like this. That St. Paul escaped condemnation here, seems owing to peculiar circumstances. The court, under the tolerating maxims of its Roman superior, seems now to have had only the privilege of examining tenets as a synod, without the penal power of magistracy*.

It would carry me too far to dwell on the excellent apology of Paul delivered before this court. He reproved their idolatry in language and by arguments perfectly classical; and he announced so much of the Gospel, as was adapted to the very ignorant state of his audience. Whoever duly examines this short masterpiece of eloquence, may see that he labours to beget in them the spirit of conviction, and to prepare them for Gospel-mercy, just as Peter did in his first sermon at Jerusalem. The means used by the two Apostles are as different, as the circumstances of a Jewish and Athenian audience were: The end aimed at by both was the same.

There is reason to apprehend, that God never suffers the plain and faithful denunciation of his

* In this however I am not very positive: A greater degree of sceptical indifference might, in the progress of refinement, have prevailed at Athens in the days of St. Paul, and the court might itself be as little disposed to persecute, as the Roman powers.

Gospel to be altogether fruitless. A few persons believed in reality and with steadfastness, among whom was Dionysius a member of the court, and a woman named Damaris. These Paul left to the care of that gracious God who had opened their eyes, and he departed from a city as yet too haughty, too scornful, and too indifferent concerning things of infinite moment, to receive the Gospel. A Church could hardly be said to be formed here, though a few individuals were converted. The little success at Athens evinces that a spirit of literary trifling in religion, where all is theory, and the conscience is unconcerned, hardens the heart effectually. What a contrast between the effects of the same Gospel dispensed to the illiterate Macedonians, and the philosophical Athenians! Yet there want not many professing Christians, who, while they stigmatize men of the former sort with the name of barbarians, bestow on the latter the appellation of enlightened philosophers.

CHAP. XI.

CORINTH.

CORINTH was, at this period, the metropolis of Greece. Its situation in an isthmus rendered it remarkably convenient for trade. It was the residence of the Roman governor of Achaia, the name then given to all Greece; and it was, at once, full of opulence, luxury, and sensuality. Hither the Apostle came from Athens, and laboured both among the Jews and the Gentiles. Here Providence favoured him with the acquaintance and friendship of Aquila and his wife Priscilla, two Jewish Christians lately expelled from Italy with other Jews, by an edict of the emperor Claudius. With them he wrought as a tent-maker, being of the same occupation: for every Jew, whether rich or poor, was obli-

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to follow some trade. After the arrival of Silas and Timothy, the Apostle with much vehemence preached to his countrymen; but opposition and abuse were the only returns he met with. The modern notions of charity will scarcely be reconciled to the zealous indignation which he showed on this occasion. He shook his garment, and told them, that he was clear of their destruction; and that he would leave them, and apply himself to the Gentiles in the city. With this denunciation he left the synagogue, and entered into the house of one Justus, a devout person, well-affected to the Gospel. Crispus also, the ruler of the synagogue, with his whole family, received the truth. But we hear of no more Jewish converts at this place. However, many Corinthians were converted. And a gracious vision of the Lord Jesus* who said to Paul in the night, "I have much people in this city," encouraged him to continue here a year and a half.—The rage of the Jews would doubtless be raised to the highest pitch; but, as usual, the moderate spirit of the Roman government prevented its sanguinary exertions. Gallio the proconsul, brother of the famous Seneca, was perfectly indifferent concerning the progress of Christianity, and refused to pay the least attention to their complaints against Paul, who now found himself so effectually preserved from the fury of his countrymen, that he remained in Corinth a considerable time longer than the above-mentioned year and a half. After his departure, Apollos, a zealous and eloquent Alexandrian Jew, came to this city, and was made a very powerful instrument of building up this Church, and of silencing the opposition of the Jews. The modesty of this man was as conspicuous as his spirit. Till he was instructed more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla, he knew no more of Christianity, than what was contained in the system of John the Baptist. That so able a man could submit to profit by others, was a proof of a humble frame.

* Acts, xviii.

It appears, that St. Paul, so far as circumstances admitted, kept up a constant correspondence with the Churches. The care of them, as he says, "came upon him daily." The Corinthians wrote to him to ask his advice on some cases of conscience; and he understood, that a variety of evils and abuses had crept in among them. On these accounts he wrote the two epistles to the Corinthians. In reviewing them, we are astonished to find how faulty many persons of this Church were; and the scene, which they exhibit, more resembles modern than primitive times, in a variety of circumstances. It falls not within the design of this history to enlarge. Former writers have, with more than sufficient accuracy, detailed the evils; let one at least be allowed briefly to record the good things of the Church of Christ. In regard to the people of Corinth, their exemption from persecution under Gallio, and their state of ease and prosperity, so uncommon with other Churches, in a great measure account for the little spirituality which they manifested. Perhaps no Church was more numerous, and none less holy in the Apostolic age. And it may teach us not to repine at the want of the MIRACULOUS operations of the Holy Spirit, when we consider that these Corinthians abounded in them. But many of them were proud of gifts, contentious, self-conceited, and warm partisans of Paul, Apollos, or Peter; and by the indulgence of this sectarian spirit, showed how little they had learned of true wisdom, which gives the Apostle occasion* to recommend the wisdom that is from above, to point out the nature and properties of spiritual understanding, and to pour a just contempt on that which is merely natural.

With the pride of false wisdom they joined a very blameable neglect in practice. One of their Church lived in incest, and the offender was not excommunicated†. St. Paul rebukes them also for the

* 1 Cor. four first chapters.

† chap. v.

litigiousness and lasciviousness*. In answer to their queries, he recommends celibacy as preferable to matrimony where a man can practise it, and that I think from general reasons†, as more favourable to holiness, without however depreciating matrimony, or giving the least countenance to the flood of monastic abuses, which afterwards prevailed in Christendom. But mankind are ever prone to extremes; and the extreme which is opposite to superstition so much prevails at present, that I should not wonder, if some persons should startle at what I have mentioned as the sentiments of St. Paul, though it be almost impossible for any unprejudiced person to understand him otherwise.

So little were the Corinthians exposed to persecution, that they were invited by their idolatrous neighbours to partake of their idol feasts; and there were among them those who complied‡. There were also among them false apostles, who, by pretending to instruct them gratis, endeavoured to depreciate Paul as a mercenary person§. Hence, while he rebukes the faults or defects of this people, he observes that HE laboured among them freely, which the false apostles pretended to do. He proceeds to correct an abuse which obtained in their assemblies, in the article of decency of dress; and another much worse,—the profanation of the Lord's Supper||. He insists also on the correction of their abuse of spiritual gifts, particularly those of languages¶. It appears that gifts were more prized by them, in some respects, than grace itself; and that love, which he beautifully describes, was at a low ebb among them. He occasionally mentions, however, a very common effect attendant on the preaching of the Gospel even at Corinth: If an ignorant idolater came into their assemblies, he was so penetrated with the display of the truth as it is in Jesus, that he could not but discover

* Chap. vi.

† Chap. vii.

‡ 1 Cor. viii. 10.

§ 1 Cor. ix. compared with 2 Cor. xi. 13—20.

|| 1 Cor. xi.

¶ Chap. xii. xiii. xiv.

the very secrets of his soul : he would prostrate himself in the worship of God, and report that God was in them of a truth*. And, if where the Gospel was so little honoured by the lives of its professors as at Corinth, such power attended the dispensation of it, how much more of the same kind, may we suppose, happened at Philippi and at Thessalonica? For we have not yet mentioned all the evils of this outwardly flourishing, but inwardly distempered Church. There were some, who even denied the resurrection of the body, which gives occasion to the Apostle to illustrate that important article †.

Though he had promised to revisit them soon, yet in the next epistle, he assigns a reason why he delayed longer than he had intended. Their Christian state was very imperfect; and he wished to be enabled, by their reformation, to come among them with more pleasure. In truth, he wrote the first epistle in much anguish and affliction ‡. His soul was deeply affected for this people; and while great progress in profession seemed so inconsistent with their experience and their practice, he felt the sincerest grief. He was relieved at length by the coming of Titus §, from whose account it appeared, that the admonitions were by no means fruitless. The case of the incestuous person at length was attended to by them as it ought: they proceeded even with more severity than the Apostle desired; for, though the man gave the strongest proof of repentance, they refused to readmit him into their Church, till St. Paul signified his express desire that they would do so.

There can be no doubt but that many persons

* This is a proof of the Divine Influence attendant on Christianity. General proofs of its authenticity may be drawn also from the subject of miraculous gifts. The Apostle's manner of describing these things proves their reality and their frequency. For no man could have convinced these Corinthians, that they were in possession of those gifts, if they themselves had not been conscious of them.

† Chap. xv.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 4.

§ 2 Cor. vii.

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belonging to this Church were recovered to a state of affection and practice worthy of Christianity. In particular the Apostle commends their liberality towards the distressed Christians*. But there was still an obstinate party among the Corinthians, attached to the false apostles, whose conduct extorted from him a zealous and honest commendation of himself, his endowments, and his office, which yet he manages with great address and delicacy, while he bewails the scandalous practices still existing among them†.

On his arrival at Corinth after these epistles, he doubtless executed what he had threatened, namely, some wholesome severities on offenders, unless their speedy and sincere repentance prevented the necessity of such a step. He spent three months‡ in his second visit. But we have no more particular account in Scripture of this Church.

CHAP. XII.

ROME.

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XII.

It may seem to have been purposely appointed by Infinite Wisdom, that our first accounts of the Roman Church should be very imperfect, in order to confute the proud pretensions to universal dominion, which its bishops have with unblushing arrogance supported for so many ages. If a line or two in the Gospels concerning the keys of St. Peter have been made the foundation of such lofty pretensions in his supposed successors to the primacy, how would they have gloried, if his labours at Rome had been so distinctly celebrated, as those of St. Paul in several Churches? What bounds would have been set to the pride of ecclesiastical Rome, could she have boasted of herself as the mother-church, like Jerusalem, or even exhibited such trophies of Scriptural fame, as Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, or Ephesus? The silence of

* 2 Cor. ix.

† Chap. xi. xii.

‡ Acts, xx.

Scripture is the more remarkable, because the Church itself was in an early period by no means insignificant, either for the number or the piety of its converts. Their faith was spoken of through the whole world*. The Apostle thus commends them; nor does he in his epistle to them intimate any thing peculiarly faulty in their principles or conduct. The epistle to the Romans itself, while the world endures, will be the food of Christian minds, and the richest system of doctrine to scriptural theologians. By the distinct directions which he gives for the maintenance of charity between Jews and Gentiles, it appears that there must have been a considerable number of the former among them. If one might indulge a conjecture, I should suppose that Aquila and Priscilla, who had laboured with St. Paul at Corinth both in a spiritual and temporal sense, and had been expelled from Italy by the emperor Claudius, and whom he here salutes as at Rome, were first concerned in the plantation of this Church, which was numerous, before any Apostle had been there. Andronicus and Junias are saluted also in the epistle: they were men of character among the Apostles, whose conversion were of an earlier date than St. Paul's: they were also his kinsmen, and had suffered in conjunction with him for the faith. He salutes also a number of others, though they might not all be residents of Rome. The work of Divine Grace in distinguishing persons of various families and connections is ever observable. There were saints at Rome of the two families of Aristobulus and Narcissus. The former was of the royal blood of the Maccabees, and had been carried prisoner to Rome by Pompey. He himself had suffered a variety of hardships incident to a life of turbulent ambition like his; yet some of his family, of no note in civil history, are marked as the disciples of Christ, and heirs of the true riches. Narcissus is distinguished in Rom.

* Rom. i.

history, as the ambitious prime minister of Claudius; yet some of his household were in the Lord.

Paul had long wished and even projected a visit to this Church. He did not expect that his journey thither at last was to be at Cæsar's expense. Confident however he was, that when he DID come to them, it should be "in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." And he intreats the prayers of the Romans, that he may be delivered from the infidel Jews, and be acceptable in his ministry to his believing countrymen at Jerusalem, whither he was then hastening, that "he might come to them with joy by the will of God," and be with them refreshed. Thus did Christians in those days intreat the prayers of their brethren through the world, and sympathize with one another. And the prayers were answered: Paul was saved from Jewish malice: was acceptable to the Jewish converts, "who had compassion on him in his bonds;" and was conducted safe to Rome. At Appii Forum and the three taverns he was met by the Roman Christians: he thanked God and took courage*, refreshed, as he had been confident he should be, whenever he might arrive among them. None but those, who know what is meant by the communion of saints, can conceive the pleasure which he felt on the occasion. After a charitable but fruitless attempt to do good to the principal Jews at Rome, he employed the two years of his imprisonment in receiving all who came to him, preaching with all confidence, and without molestation. On account of his imprisonment and examination at Rome, the nature of the Gospel began to be enquired into† in Nero's court, and the conclusion of the epistle to the Philippians makes it evident, that some of the imperial household became Christians indeed. And as the court was by no means disposed to treat him with rigour, but rather to favour him with indulgences as a Roman citizen, hence many preachers in Rome

* Acts, xxviii. 15.

† Philippians, i.

and the neighbourhood exerted themselves with more courage than formerly they dared to do. Yet certain persons even then could preach Christ with malevolent views of depreciating the Apostles: others did it with sincere charity. But as real benefit accrued to the souls of men from the labours of the former as well as of the latter, the heart of Paul, with a charity, the wonderful effect of heavenly teaching, could rejoice in both.

Some writers seem to have gone too far, in denying that Peter ever was at Rome. But the cause of Protestantism needs not the support of an unreasonable scepticism. Undoubtedly the account of Peter's martyrdom there, with that of Paul, rests on a foundation sufficiently strong, namely, the concurrent voice of antiquity. His first epistle, by an expression at the close of it*, appears to have been dated thence; for the Church at Babylon, according to the style of Christians at that time, could be no other than the Church at Rome.—Of the literal Babylon we find nothing in the writings of those days.

CHAP. XIII.

COLOSSE.

THIS city of Phrygia was in the neighbourhood of Laodicea and Hierapolis, and all three seem to have been converted by the ministry of Epaphras the Colossian, a companion and fellow-labourer of Paul, who attended him at Rome during his imprisonment, and informed him of the sincerity and fruitfulness of their Christian profession. For though he speaks to the Colossians only, yet the religious state of the two neighbouring cities may be conceived to be much the same. The example of Epaphras deserves to be pointed out to the imitation of all ministers.

* 1 Pet. v. 13.

CHAP. XIV.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

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THERE are some countries, to which we understand that the Gospel was carried during the first effusion of the Holy Spirit, which are only incidentally mentioned without any detail of facts.

Extensive as we have seen, from St. Luke's narrative, the labours of the Apostle Paul were, it is evident from the epistles, that he is far from relating the whole of them. We cannot learn, for instance, from the Acts, when he visited Crete. Yet the short epistle to Titus, whom he left there with episcopal authority to ordain ministers in every city, and to regulate the churches, shows that that island of a hundred cities had been considerably evangelized; and that many persons, among a people proverbially deceitful, ferocious, and intemperate, had received the wholesome yoke of Christ.

And though I cannot but think, that the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, to whom St. Peter addresses his two epistles, must mean the Jews of those countries, yet their conversion would doubtless be attended with that of many Gentiles. Of three of these we know nothing particularly: the work of God in Galatia has been reviewed; and Asia propria alone, of all the evangelized regions mentioned in scripture history, so far as I can discover, remains now to be considered.

It was on his first departure from Corinth, that Paul first visited Ephesus*, which name stands at the head of the seven Churches of Asia, to whom St. John dedicates the book of the Revelation. The impression made on his hearers during this visit, must have been

* Acts, xviii. 19.

remarkably great, as it was but a short one, and as they pressed his longer continuance among them. He left with them however for their comfort and instruction Aquila and Priscilla, whose labours were afterwards assisted by Apollos.

Paul himself returning to Ephesus, baptized in the name of Jesus about twelve disciples, who had hitherto received only John's baptism*. From this circumstance we learn, that from the first preaching of the Baptist nothing had been done in vain. The imperfect elements of that harbinger of Christ had paved the way for clearer discoveries, and a variety of preparatory works had tended to ripen the Church of God into the fulness of light and holiness.

Paul preached three months in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus, till the usual perverseness of the Jews induced him to desist, and to form the converts into a distinct Church. One Tyrannus lent his school for the service of Christianity; and in that convenient place, for the space of two years, the Apostle daily ministered, instructed, and disputed. And thus the whole region of Asia propria had at different times an opportunity of hearing the Gospel.

In no place does the word of God seem so much to have triumphed as at Ephesus. No less numerous than those of Corinth, the believers were much more spiritual. The work of conversion was deep, vigorous, and soul-transforming to a great degree. Many persons, struck with the horror of their former crimes, made an open confession; and many, who had dealt in the abominations of sorcery, now showed their sincere detestation of them by burning their books before all men, the price of which amounted to a large sum. "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed."—Thus triumphs the sacred historian.—Satan must have trembled for his kingdom: the emptiness of all the systems of philosophy appeared no less palpable, than the flagitiousness of vice,

* Acts, xix.

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of the
Ephesians.

the enormities of idolatry: The spiritual power of Jesus was never seen in a stronger light since the day of Pentecost; and the venal priesthood of Diana the celebrated goddess of Ephesus, apprehended the total ruin of their hierarchy.

No place on earth was more devoted to idolatry. A number of ingenious artists were enriched by making silver shrines for Diana. They felt a sensible diminution of their commerce, and found themselves bound by interest to support the credit of the goddess. Most people through almost all Asia had been induced to believe, that manufactured gods were mere nothings; and it seemed high time to make some strong efforts in favour of the declining superstition. They soon prevailed so far as to fill the city with tumult; and they hurried two of Paul's companions with them into the theatre, where the whole mob assembled. The daring spirit of Paul would have led him into the same place. His Christian friends interposed, and even some of the Asiarchs,—persons who presided over the games,—who had a personal esteem for him, kindly dissuaded him. His zeal seems not void of rashness, but it was the rashness of a hero vexed to the soul to think that Gaius and Aristarchus, his two friends, were likely to suffer in his absence. Now I apprehend was that season of extreme distress, which he felt in Asia, and which he describes so pathetically* in his epistle to the Corinthians. Human resources failed; and God alone, he learnt, could support him. The prudent and eloquent harangue of a magistrate, called the town-clerk, was the providential instrument of his deliverance. He calmed the spirit of the Ephesians, and silenced the uproar; after which Paul affectionately embraced the disciples, and left Ephesus. Three years he had laboured with great success; and he had the precaution to leave pastors to superintend that and the neighbouring Churches. But he foresaw

* 2 Cor. i. 8, 9, 10.

with grief, as he afterwards told these pastors in a very pathetic address, when he had sent for them to Miletus*, that their present purity would not continue unstained. Wolves would enter among them to devour the flock; and, among themselves heretical perverseness would find countenance, and produce pernicious separations. He did all, however, which man could do: he warned them of the danger; and exhorted them to the persevering discharge of their duty.

The parting between the Apostles and these ministers cannot be read without emotion. The elegant and affecting narrative of St. Luke is before the reader, and ought not to be abridged. The corruption of this excellent Church, seems not, however, to have taken place, when he wrote to them his epistle. It is full of instruction; and, next to that to the Romans, may be looked on as a most admirable system of divinity. It has this remarkable recommendation, that it will serve for any Church and for any age. Not a vestige appears in it of any thing peculiarly miraculous, or exclusively primitive. The controversies of the Christian world concerning doctrine would soon be decided, if men would submit to be taught by the simple, literal, and grammatical meaning of this short treatise. Every thing of doctrine and of duty is in it; and what the Gospel really is, may thence be collected with the greatest certainty.

It appears that Timothy was the chief pastor at Ephesus in Paul's absence†. The Apostle's first epistle to him throws some light on the state of this Church during his administration. There were some persons of a Judaical and legal turn of mind, who endeavoured, by contentious questions, to pervert the simplicity of evangelical faith, hope, and love. There were others in the opposite extreme: Two are particularly characterized, Hymenæus and Alexander, who abused the profession of the faith to such

* Acts, xx.

† 1 Tim. i.

licentiousness, as to render their ejection from the Church a necessary measure. So early were the Churches of Christ infected with the same evils, which at this day fail not to attend the propagation of Divine truth! From the directions which he gives to Timothy concerning the regulation of public worship, and the character and conduct of church-officers, it appears, indeed, that ecclesiastical polity had taken a firm root in this Church. But modern partisans and bigots will still search the Scriptures in vain to find their own exact model, in matters, which the word of God hath left indifferent, or at least to be decided only by various circumstances of prudential expediency: Churches will, doubtless, be much better employed, in establishing and in observing useful practical rules, which are compatible with very different forms of government. I should suspect, that the superstitious and self-righteous spirit, which, under a thousand austerities, afterwards supported itself in the eastern Churches, and proved one of the most powerful engines of popery, had even then begun to show itself in Ephesus, and had given occasion to the apostolical cautions, as well as to the prophetic declaration of the vast increase of those evils in after times*. It was the charitable practice of the Church of Ephesus, to maintain Christian widows at the public expense. But I fear this liberality had been abused. Young widows, who had been living a life of ease, had thrown themselves as a burden on their religious brethren; and however high they might appear in Christian profession, some of them exchanged the love of Christ for the love of the world, and the indulgence of sensuality†. As an idle life is a great source of these evils, the Apostle recommends that these should be encouraged to enter again into the matrimonial state, which would furnish laudable domestic employments, rather than that they should be maintained by the Church in a state of indolence. The widows, who

* 1 Tim. iv.

† v. 15.

should be so maintained by the public stock, he recommends to be those, who were far advanced in life, of eminent laborious piety, and distinguished for their works of charity.

On the whole, we may discover among these excellent people some appearances of the very worst of evils; which, as yet, made feeble efforts, were kept down by the superior light and grace that prevailed, and which seemed in indignant silence to be expecting future opportunities of diffusing themselves.

We know nothing more of this Church during the remainder of St. Paul's life, nor after his death, till towards the close of the first century. St. John, the only survivor of the Apostles, long continued his fatherly care of the Churches of Asia propria. During his exile at Patmos he was favoured with an astonishing and magnificent vision of the Lord Jesus*, from whom he received several distinct charges, addressed to the seven Churches of Asia, descriptive of their spiritual state at that time, and containing suitable directions to each of them. The pastors of the Churches are called angels; and what has been observable in all ages was then the case,—the character of the pastors was much the same with that of the people. We have here then, from the highest authority, some account of the state of these Churches at the close of the first century.—It is short, but important.—Let us endeavour to comprise it into as clear a view as possible.

The Ephesians were still alive in the faith†. Attempts had been made to pervert them, but in vain. However subtle the poison of heresy be, here it could find no admission. Nor could the abominations of the Nicolaitanes, who appear to have been a sect extremely corrupt in morals, make any progress among them. They patiently bore the cross ever attendant on the real faith of Jesus, but could endure nothing

Character
of the
Church of
Ephesus.

* Rev. i.

† Rev. ii.

that tended to adulterate it. The taste and spirit of the Gospel continued with them: they laboured in good works without fainting or weariness; and their spiritual discernment was not to be imposed on by any pretences. Yet they had declined from the intenseness of that love which they had at first exhibited: Their hearts panted not after Christ with that steady ardour which formerly had animated this people; and, with all the marks of sound health remaining, their vigour had much abated.

How exactly does this account agree with the common case of the best Christian churches. Because it is a common case, and far from being the worst case. Christians are apt to be content under such a decline and to impute it to necessity, or to the loss of sudden fervours of no great value, and to plume themselves on the solidity of an improved judgment. But true zeal and true charity should be shown habitually, and not only now and then when occasional inroads of the enemy may happen to call for particular exertions. These affections ought to grow as the understanding is improved. The spirit of prayer, of love to Christ, of active services for his name, was now abated at Ephesus, and a cool prudence was too much magnified at the expense of charity. The eternal salvation of real Christians there was safe; but real Christians should have more in view than their own salvation,—namely, the propagation of godliness to posterity. These cautious Christians did not consider that their decline paved the way for farther and more melancholy declensions in the divine life: that the influence of their example was likely to be mischievous to those who followed; that their juniors would much more readily imitate their defects than their virtues; in fine, that a foundation was already laid for the unchurching of this people, and for the desolation in which this very region now remains under Mahometan wickedness and ignorance.

were at once in a state of great purity of doctrine, and holiness of heart and life. The Divine Saviour commends them in general. That toward the end of the first century, they should have preserved the divine life in such vigour,—a period of about forty years most probably, if indeed there had been no intermissions,—is somewhat extraordinary, and except in the case of Philadelphia, not easily paralleled in history:—So naturally does depravity prevail, in a course of time, over the best-constituted churches. But their tribulation and poverty are particularly marked. They were rich in heavenly grace, poor in worldly circumstances. If poor Churches were fully sensible of the mischiefs which often arise from the accession of opulent individuals, they would not plume themselves so much on the admission of such members as they often do. The Smyranean Christians were chiefly of the poorer sort of inhabitants; yet were they infested with pretenders, of the same spirit as those, who attempted to adulterate the Gospel at Ephesus. Of the Smyrneans it may be sufficient to say, that they made large pretensions to pure religion; that their corruptions were Judaical; and that they were under the influence of Satan. This Church is taught to expect a severe persecution which was to last some time; and they are exhorted to persevere in faith.

The Church of Pergamus was also approved of in general. They lived in the midst of a very impious people, who, in effect, worshipped Satan himself, and did all that in them lay to support his kingdom. Yet was their zeal firm and steady. Nor was its object a few trifling punctilios, or some little niceties of a doubtful disputation, but the precious name of Christ himself, and the faith of his Gospel. Hence they were exposed not only to contempt, but to danger of life itself, and to cruel sufferings. Our Lord mentions one person with particular complacency, “my faithful martyr Antipas.” We know no more of him than what is here recorded,—that “he

The Church
of Perga-
mus.

was slain among them, where Satan dwelt." But what an honour to be thus distinguished! Volumes of panegyric have been composed for mere statesmen, heroes, and scholars. How frigid do they all appear taken together, compared with this simple testimony of Jesus! But this Church does not escape censure entirely. There were among them certain wicked and dangerous characters, who, acting like Balaam of old, were employed by Satan to entice persons to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication;—two evils often closely connected: Even the abominations of the Nicolaitanes were practised by some. All these are exhorted to repent, from the fear of divine vengeance. On the whole, with a few exceptions, and those indeed of an extraordinary degree of malignity, the Church of Pergamus was pure and lively, and upheld the standard of truth, though encircled with the flames of martyrdom.

The Church
of Thyatira.

The Church of Thyatira was in a thriving state. Charity, active services, patient dependence on God, and a steady reliance on the divine promises, marked their works: and, what is peculiarly laudable, their last works were more excellent than their first*. A sounder proof of genuine religion than such a gradual improvement can scarcely be conceived. Yet it is imputed as a fault to this Church, that they suffered an artful woman to seduce the people into the same evils, which had infected Pergamus. Her real name we know not: her allegorical name is Jezebel: she resembled the wife of Ahab, who kept four hundred prophets at her table, and exerted all her influence to promote idolatry. The people of God should have counteracted her, but they did not; an advantage which deceitful guides have often gained through the negligence of the sincere. The very sex of the pretended prophetess was a sufficient reason why she should have been restrained. "Let your women keep silence in the Churches †," is an express

* Rev. ii. 19.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

prohibition of females from the office of teaching, however useful in other respects pious women may be in the Church. Our Lord informs the Church in Thyatira, that he gave her space to repent, but to no purpose, and therefore now denounces severe threatenings against her and her associates, at the same time vindicating his claim to divine worship by the incommunicable title of him who searches the hearts, and declaring that he would make himself known to be such in all the Churches. To those who had kept themselves unspotted from these evils, he declares "he would put no other burden on them:" only he exhorts them to hold fast what they already had to the day of judgment. The unsound Christians in this place pretended to great depths of knowledge, which were, in reality, depths of Satan.—Such persons often impose on others, and are imposed on themselves, by pretences to profound knowledge and to superior degrees of sanctity.

The Church of Sardis presents us with an unpleasing spectacle. Their great inferiority to Thyatira evinces, how possible it is for two societies of Christians holding the same doctrines, to be in a very different state. He who "walks in the midst of the Churches," extols the growing faith and charity of the first, and condemns the drooping condition of the second. They had neglected that course of prayer and watchfulness, which is necessary to preserve the divine life in vigour. Their works were now faintly distinguishable from those of persons altogether dead in sin. Some* good things remained in them, which yet were ready to die: but their lives brought no glory to God, nor benefit to the cause of Christ; and could scarcely prevent its being scandalized in the world. A few names indeed there were in Sardis, whom Jesus looked on with complacency: they had not defiled their garments. But most of the Christians there had contracted deep stains, probably by freely.

The Church
of Sardis.

* Rev. iii.

The causes
of the de-
clension of
the Church
of Sardis.

mixing with the world, and by conforming to its customs. And we see here an awful fact authenticated in the highest possible manner,—that among a society of persons all professing the Gospel, the greater part may be very dead in their souls. It should ever be remembered, that human nature is averse to real faith, heavenly hope, and genuine charity. An omnipotent energy alone can produce or preserve true holiness. This had been the case at Sardis, when the Church partook of the first effusion of the Spirit. Quite contrary to the usual course of natural things, which are brought to perfection by slow and gradual improvements, in Christ's religion godliness starts up in the infancy of things in its best form. Seldom are the last works, as was the case at Thyatira, more abundant or more excellent. Heresies, refinements, human cautions, commonly adulterate the work of God. An abuse, perhaps, of some frantic enthusiast appears: the correction of it by some presumptuous pretender to reason introduces another more specious, but more durable one. The love of the world increases with the abatement of persecution. The natural propensity of man to sin exerts itself more and more: lively Christians are removed by death: their juniors inferior in all solid godliness, superior only in self-estimation, reduce the standard of Christian grace lower and lower: apologies are invented for sin; what was once experimentally known, becomes matter of barren speculation: Even Scriptural terms expressive of vital religion are despised or sparingly used: fainter and more polite modes of speech, better adapted to classical neatness, but proper to hide and disguise the ambiguities of scepticism, are introduced: the pride of reasoning grows strong: and men chuse rather to run the risk of hell itself, than to be thoroughly humbled. The strong hand of God alone, in overbearing convictions and terrors, and in the sweetest, but most powerful attractions of grace, can conquer this contemptuous

spirit. . No wonder then, that those who never felt, or who have quenched in a great measure these terrors and these attractions, relapse into an impatient fastidiousness. And then the influence of the Holy Spirit itself is reasoned against with petty cavils, and aspersed by illiberal suspicions. Unfaithful and unexperienced persons, who undertake to teach in these circumstances, will often, in attempting to discriminate the operations of the Spirit of God from delusions, be unfeeling, rough, and unskilful. To them weeds and flowers in the garden of Paradise will be the same thing. A malignant instinct of profane propensity tempts them to pull up all together, till they leave only the love of the world, and, what they proudly call, common sense; which last expression will be found, at bottom, to denote a very mischievous engine in religious matters; for, so applied, it means neither more nor less than simply, the natural, unassisted powers of the human mind, darkened and corrupted, as they are, by the fall. And now, by frequent disuse, prayer and religious exercises, grow disagreeable: Sensual and worldly objects allure the carnal mind with success: Lucrative speculations in commerce devour the spirit of godly meditation: The seasons of religious duty are justled out by the throng of business; and excuses of necessity are easily admitted: Men find a pleasure in being no longer reputed fanatics; and professors of Christianity will now ask leave of the world, how far it will permit them to proceed in religion without offence.

I dare not say, that all this exactly took place at Sardis; but much of it did, no doubt; and on occasion of this first instance of a general declension, it seemed not unreasonable to point out its ordinary progress and symptoms.

The Christians of Philadelphia are highly extolled. They were a humble, charitable, fervent people, deeply sensible of their own weakness, fearful of being seduced by Satan and their own hearts.

The Church
of Philadel-
phia.

Spirit assures them, that they had a little strength, which had at once been proved and exerted in holding fast the simplicity of the Gospel, and in detecting and resisting all adulterations of it. They are further assured, that the Judaical heretics should be brought at length to submit to become their disciples in religion: And a promise of strong support is held out to them, because they had maintained a true patience in suffering. To them, as to all the rest of the Churches, the rewards beyond the grave are proposed as the grand motives of perseverance.

The Church
of Laodi-
cea.

Laodicea too much resembled Sardis. The people were in a **LUKEWARM** state, a religious mediocrity, most odious to Christ; because his religion calls for the whole vehemence of the soul, and bids us to be cool only in **WORLDLY** things. The foundation of this lukewarmness was laid in pride: They had lost the conviction of their internal blindness, misery, and depravity. When men go on for years in a placid unfeeling uniformity, this is always the case. They were satisfied with themselves, and felt no need of higher attainments. The counsel, which is given to them,—to buy of him gold, white raiment, and eyesalve,—is precious; and this call to their souls demonstrates that they had learnt to maintain, in easy indolence, an orthodoxy of sentiments without any vivid attention to the Spirit of God:—In a word, his influence was only not despised in Laodicea.

Such were the situations of the seven Churches of Asia. The criticism is indeed inestimable: It is candid, impartial, and penetrating. He, who has indulged us with it, intended it for the use of all succeeding Churches:—and “he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.”

CHAP. XV.

THE REMAINDER OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

It is the observation of one of the ancients, that St. Luke, in the close of his Apostolical history, leaves the reader thirsting for more. I feel the force and justness of the thought at this moment. I have hitherto sailed by the compass of Scripture; and now find myself at once entering into an immense ocean without a guide. In fact I have undertaken to conduct the reader through a long, obscure, and difficult course, with scarcely a beacon here and there set up to direct me:—but I must make the best use I can of the very scanty materials before me.

CHAP.
XV.

It seems plain, that the Apostles in general did not leave Judea, till after the first council held at Jerusalem. They seem never to have been in haste to quit the land of their nativity. Probably the threatening appearances of its desolation by the Romans, hastened their departure into distant regions. It is certain that before the close of this century, the power of the Gospel was felt throughout the Roman empire.—I shall divide this chapter into four parts, and review, first,—The progress and persecution of the Church. Secondly,—The lives, characters, and deaths of the Apostles and most celebrated Evangelists. Thirdly,—The heresies of this period. And, lastly,—The general character of Christianity in this first age.

It was about the year of our Lord 64, that the city of Rome sustained a general conflagration. The emperor Nero, lost as he was to all sense of reputation, and hackneyed in flagitiousness, was yet studious to avert the infamy of being reckoned the author of this calamity, which was generally imputed to him. But no steps that he could take were

Burning of
Rome:A. D.
64.

sufficient to do away with the suspicion. There was, however, a particular class of people, so singularly distinct from the rest of mankind, and so much hated on account of the condemnation which their doctrine and purity of life affixed to all except themselves, that they might be calumniated with impunity. These were then known at Rome by the name of Christians. Unless we transplant ourselves into those times, we can scarcely conceive how odious and contemptible the appellation then was. The judicious Tacitus calls their religion a detestable superstition *, “ which at first was suppressed, and afterwards broke out afresh, and spread not only through Judea the origin of the evil, but through the metropolis also, the common sewer in which every thing filthy and flagitious meets and spreads.” If so grave and cautious a writer as Tacitus can thus asperse the Christians without proof, and without moderation, we need not wonder that so impure a wretch as Nero should not hesitate to charge them with the fact of burning Rome.

First persecution of the Christians by the Romans :

A. D.
64.

Now it was that the Romans legally persecuted the Church for the first time. And those, who know the virulence of man’s natural enmity, will rather wonder that it commenced not earlier, than that it raged at length with such dreadful fury. “ Some persons were apprehended, who confessed themselves Christians; and by their evidence, says Tacitus, a great multitude afterwards were discovered and seized :—and they were condemned not so much for the burning of Rome, as for being the enemies of mankind.” A very remarkable accusation ! It may be explained as follows :—True Christians, though the genuine friends of all their fellow-creatures, cannot allow men, who are NOT true Christians, to be in the favour of God. Their very earnestness, in calling on their neighbours to repent and believe the Gospel, proves to those neighbours in what

* Tacitus, B. xv.

a dangerous state they are then apprehended to be. All, who are not moved by the admonitions of Christian charity to flee from the wrath to come, will naturally be disgusted; and thus the purest benevolence will be construed into the most merciless bigotry. Thus Christians incurred the general hatred, to which the conduct neither of Jews nor heretics rendered them obnoxious.—And the same cause produces similar effects to this day.

Their execution was aggravated with insult. They were covered with skins of wild beasts and torn by dogs: they were crucified, and set on fire, that they might serve for lights in the night-time. Nero offered his gardens for this spectacle, and exhibited the games of the circus. People could not, however, avoid pitying them, base and undeserving as they were in the eyes of Tacitus, because they suffered not for the public good, but to gratify the cruelty of a tyrant. It appears from a passage in Seneca*, compared with Juvenal, that Nero ordered them to be covered with wax, and other combustible materials: and that, after a sharp stake was put under their chin, to make them continue upright, they were burnt alive to give light to the spectators†.

We have no account how the people of God conducted themselves under these sufferings. What we know of their behaviour in similar scenes, leave us in no doubt of their having been supported by the power of the Holy Ghost. Nor is it credible, that the persecution should have been confined to Rome. It would naturally spread through the empire; and one of Cyriac's inscriptions found in Spain‡, demonstrates at once two important facts,—that the Gospel had already penetrated into that country, and—that the Church there also had her martyrs.

Three or four years were probably the utmost

* Seneca, Ep. 14. Juv. 1 and 8, with his Scholiast.

† Bullet's History of Established Christianity.

‡ See Gibbon's Account of Christianity considered, p. 94.

- A. D. 68. extent of this tremendous persecution, as in the year 68 the tyrant was himself, by a dreadful exit, summoned before the divine tribunal. He left the Roman world in a state of extreme confusion. Judea partook of it in a remarkable degree. About forty years after our Lord's sufferings, wrath came on the body of the Jewish nation to the uttermost, in a manner too well known to need the least relation in this history. What became of the Christian Jews alone concerns us. The congregation were commanded, by an oracle revealed to the best approved among them, that before the wars began, they should depart from the city, and inhabit a village beyond Jordan, called Pella*. Thither they retired, and were saved from the destruction, which soon after overwhelmed their countrymen: and in so retiring they at once observed the precept, and fulfilled the well-known prophecy of their Saviour. The death of Nero, and the destruction of Jerusalem, would naturally occasion some respite to them from their sufferings; and we hear no more of their persecuted state, till the reign of Domitian, the last of the Flavian family, who succeeded to the empire in the year 81.
- A. D. 81.

He does not appear to have raged against the Christians, till the latter end of his reign. Indeed, in imitation of his father Vespasian, he made inquiry for such of the Jews as were descended from the royal line of David. His motives were evidently political. But there wanted not those who were glad of any opportunity of wreaking their malice on Christians. Some persons, who were brought before the emperor, were charged with being related to the royal family. They appear to have been related to our Lord, and were grandsons of Jude the Apostle, his cousin. Domitian asked them, if they were of the family of David, which they acknowledged. He then demanded, what possessions they enjoyed, and

* Euseb. B. iii. C. 5.

what money they had. They laid open the poverty of their circumstances, and owned that they maintained themselves by their labour. The truth of their confession was evinced by their hands, and by their appearance in general. Domitian then interrogated them concerning Christ and his kingdom,—when and where it should appear? They answered, like their master when questioned by Pilate,—that his kingdom was not of this world, but heavenly: that its glory should appear at the consummation of the world, when he should judge the quick and dead, and reward every man according to his works. Poverty is sometimes a defence against oppression, though it never shields from contempt. Domitian was satisfied, that his throne was in no danger from Christian ambition: and the grandsons of Jude were dismissed with the same sort of derision with which their Saviour had formerly been dismissed by Herod. Thus had the Son of God provided for his indigent relations:—they were poor in circumstances, but rich in faith, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom.

As Domitian increased in cruelty, toward the end of his reign he renewed the horrors of Nero's persecution. He* put to death many persons accused of atheism, the common charge against Christians, on account of their refusal to worship the pagan gods. Among these was the consul Flavius Clemens his cousin, who had espoused Flavia Domitilla his relation. Suetonius observes, that this man was quite despicable on account of his slothfulness. Many others were condemned likewise, who had embraced Jewish customs, says Dion; part of them were put to death, others spoiled of their goods, and Domitilla herself was banished into the island of Pandataria. Eusebius records the same facts with some little variation: but, as he professes to borrow from the pagan writers in this instance, I shall be content with their account.

Domitian
persecu

A. 1

95

* Euseb. B. iii. 17. Dion Cassius.

It is not hard to conceive the real characters of those two noble persons. It ought not to be doubted that they were genuine Christians, whom God had distinguished by his grace, and enabled to live upon it, and to suffer for it. The blood of the Cæsars, and the splendor of the imperial house, rendered them only more conspicuous objects of disgust. It is well known that no positive crime is ascribed to either of them. The charge of indolence against the husband is natural enough, and does honour to the heavenly-mindedness of the man, whose spirit could not mix with the evils of secular ambition, and with the vices of the imperial court.—The humanity of the times in which we live, and the blessings of the civil freedom which the subjects of these kingdoms enjoy, protect us, it is true, from similar dangers of life or property; nevertheless, who has not observed, that even rank and dignity are among us exposed to considerable contempt, whenever a man is conspicuous and eminent for a zealous profession and diligent practice of truly Evangelical doctrines and precepts?

A. D.
96.

In the year 96 Domitian was slain: and Nerva, the succeeding emperor, published a pardon* for those who were condemned for impiety, recalled those who were banished, and forbade the accusing of any men on account of impiety, or Judaism. Others, who were under accusation or under sentence of condemnation, now escaped by the lenity of Nerva. This brings us to the close of the century, in which we behold the Christians for the present, in a state of external peace. Only one person enjoyed not the benefit of Nerva's mildness. Domitilla still continued in exile, probably because she was a relation of the late tyrant, whose name was now odious through the world.—Doubtless she was not forsaken of her God and Saviour.

II. The Apostles and Evangelists of this period

* Dion.

were their story distinctly known, and circumstantially related, would afford materials indeed of the rarest pleasure to every Christian mind. But there never arose in the Church any historians like Thucydides and Livy, to illustrate and celebrate the actions of saints. Heroes and statesmen have their reward here,—saints hereafter. Christ's kingdom must not appear to be of this world ; and while large volumes have been filled with the exploits of heroes, and the intrigues of statesmen, the men, who were the divine instruments of evangelizing souls,—the New Testament history excepted,—are for the most part unknown.

The first of the twelve Apostles who suffered martyrdom, we have seen, was James the son of Zebedee : He fell a sacrifice to Herod Agrippa's ambitious desire of popularity. I recal him to the reader's memory, on account of a remarkable circumstance attending his death *. The man, who had drawn him before the tribunal, when he saw the readiness with which he submitted to martyrdom, was struck with remorse ; and, by one of those sudden conversions not infrequent amidst the remarkable effusions of the Spirit, was himself turned from the power of Satan to God. He confessed Christ with great cheerfulness. James and this man were both led to execution ; and in the way thither the accuser requested the Apostle's forgiveness, which he obtained. James turning to him answered, " Peace be to thee ;" and kissed him ; and they were beheaded together. The efficacy of Divine Grace, and the blessed fruit of holy example, are both illustrated in this story, of which it were to be wished we knew more than the very scanty account which has been delivered.

The other James was preserved in Judea to a much later period. His martyrdom took place

Martyrdom
of James
the Just.

* Euseb. i. 9.

A. D.
62.

about the year 62 ; and his epistle was published a little before his death. As he always resided at Jerusalem, and was providentially preserved through various persecutions, he had an opportunity of overcoming enmity itself, and abating prejudice, in some measure. The name of **JUST** was generally given him on account of his singular innocence and integrity. And as he conformed to Jewish customs with more than occasional regularity, he was by no means so odious in the eyes of his unbelieving countrymen, as the Apostle of the Gentiles. But we are to observe, that if he had fully overcome their enmity, he could not have been faithful to his Lord and Master. Many Jews respected the man, and admired the **FRUITS** of the Gospel in him. The root and principle of these fruits was still their abhorrence ; and from the relation of Eusebius, the testimony of Hegesippus, an early Christian historian whom he quotes, and of Josephus, it is plain, that it was thought a pitiable thing, that so good a man should be a Christian. Paul's escape from Jewish malice, by appealing to Cæsar, had sharpened the spirits of this people ; and they were determined to wreak their vengeance on James, who was merely a Jew, and could plead no Roman exemptions. Festus died president of Judæa ; and, before his successor Albinus arrived, Ananias the high-priest, a Sadducee and a merciless persecutor, held the supreme power in the interim. He called a council, before which he summoned James with some others, and accused them of breaking the law of Moses. But it was not easy to procure his condemnation. His holy life had long secured the veneration of his countrymen*.

* I have compared Josephus's account with that of Hegesippus, which last appears compatible enough with the former, and no way improbable ; though I think he gives his character more of the ascetic, than I believe to be consistent with that of a Christian Apostle.

The leading men were uneasy on account of the vast increase of Christian converts, added to the Church by his labours, example, and authority: and they endeavoured to entangle him, by persuading him to mount a pinnacle of the temple, and to speak to the people assembled at the time of the passover, against Christianity. James being placed aloft, delivered a frank confession of Jesus; and declared that he was then sitting at the right hand of power, and that he would come in the clouds of heaven. Upon this Ananias and the rulers were highly incensed. To disgrace his character was their first intention—they failed. To murder his person was their next attempt; and this was of much more easy execution. Crying out, that Justus himself was seduced, they threw the Apostle down, and stoned him. He had strength to fall on his knees, and to pray, “I beseech thee, Lord God and Father, for them; for they know not what they do.” One of the priests moved with the scene, cried out, “Cease, what do you mean? This just man is praying for you.” A person present with a fuller’s club beat out his brains, and completed his martyrdom.

Very remarkable is the acknowledgment of Josephus. “These things”—meaning the miseries of the Jews from the Romans—“happened to them by way of revenging the death of James the Just, the brother of Jesus whom they call Christ. For the Jews slew him, though a very just man*.” And from

Observation
of Josephus.

* I see no good reason to doubt the authenticity of this passage; which gives abundant confirmation to his famous testimony of Christ; which is as follows: “About this time lived Jesus a wise man; if indeed we may call him a man; for he performed marvellous things; he was an instructor of such as embraced the truth with pleasure. He made many converts both among the Jews and Greeks. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, on the accusation of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those, who before entertained a respect for him, continued still so to do; for he appeared to them alive again on the third day; the divine prophets having declared these and many other wonderful things concerning

the same writer we learn, that Albinus severely reprimanded Ananias, and soon after deprived him of the high priesthood.

After the death of James and the desolation of Jerusalem, the Apostles and disciples of our Lord, of whom many were yet alive, gathered themselves together with our Lord's kinsmen, to appoint a pastor of the church of Jerusalem in the room of James. The election fell on Simeon, the son of that Cleopas, mentioned by St. Luke as one of the two who went to Emmaus, and who was the brother of Joseph, our Lord's reputed father.—We shall leave Simeon, at the end of this century, the chief pastor of the Jewish church.

Paul the Apostle seems to have laboured with unwearied activity from about the year 36 to the year 63, that is, from his conversion to the period in which St. Luke finishes his history. Within this period he wrote fourteen epistles, which will be the blessed means of feeding the souls of the faithful to the end of time. The second epistle to Timothy has been commonly supposed to have been written just before his martyrdom. I am convinced by Dr. Lardner's reasonings*, that it was more probably written during his two years imprisonment at Rome,

* See the Supplement to the Credibility.

him. And the sect of Christians so named from him subsists to this very time."

I have examined, as carefully as I can, the doubts which have been started on the authenticity of this passage. To me they seem mere surmises. One of them, the supposed inconsistency of the historian, in testifying so much of Christ, and yet remaining an unconverted Jew, affords an argument in its favour. Inconsistencies ought to be expected from inconsistent persons. Such are many in the Christian world at this day, who in like circumstances would have acted a similar part. Such was Josephus. He knew and had studied something of all sorts of opinions in religion; and his writings show him to have been firm in nothing but a regard to his worldly interest. To me he seems to say just so much and no more of Christ, as might be expected from a learned sceptic, of remarkable good sense, and supreme love of worldly things.

REMAINDER OF FIRST CENTURY.

and that he was under no particular apprehension of suffering immediately*. From this epistle it is evident that he had already been called before Nero, agreeably to the prediction, "thou must be brought before Cæsar;" and that no Christian, not even any of those who had welcomed his arrival in Italy, durst appear in support of him:—He feelingly complains, "all men forsook me." Yet he knew how to distinguish between malevolence and timidity; and, therefore, though he could not excuse their neglect of him, he prays God that it might not be laid to their charge. The terror of Nero seems to have overawed the Roman Christians, many of whom might have borne witness in his favour. Even Demas forsook him, from the love of the world, and departed to Thessalonica. There are seasons of critical danger, which try the hearts of the truest Christians: It was yet a new thing for a Christian to be brought before an emperor, and they had not prepared themselves by watching and prayer for the uncommon occasion. But the grace of the Lord Jesus, which had hitherto been so eminently with the Apostle, forsook him not in his trying moments: The Lord "stood with him, and strengthened him†:" He was enabled to testify for Christ and his Gospel before Nero, with the same frankness, fortitude, and eloquence, that he had formerly done before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa; and for the first time, and probably the last, the murderous tyrant Nero heard the glad tidings of salvation. It seems, by the expression,—"that all the Gentiles might hear,"—that Paul was heard in a very full and solemn assembly, and had an opportunity of giving a clear account of Christianity. And as some of Cæsar's household are mentioned as saints in the epistle to the Philippians, there is reason to apprehend, that the preaching was

* This seems evident by his charging Timothy to come to him before winter.

† 2 Tim. iv. 17.

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XV.

not in vain. He was, as he owns, “delivered from the mouth of the lion.” Nero had not then begun to persecute; and at least he would see the justness of his plea as a Roman citizen, and be disposed to favour it. Nor ought the adorable Providence of God to be passed in silence, who gave this man of abandoned wickedness an opportunity of hearing the word of salvation, though it made no useful impression on his mind. Paul seems to have had this audience during the former part of his imprisonment at Rome, and to have been remanded to his confinement for the present.

A. D.
62.

Here he wrote the epistles to the Philippians and Colossians before the end of the year 62. From the former of these it appears, that the whole court of Nero was made acquainted with his case, and that the cause of the Gospel was promoted by these means. In the epistle to Philemon, which accompanied that to the Colossians, he expresses a confidence of being soon set at liberty, and promises, in that case, shortly to pay them a visit*. And as he mentions Demas with respect as his fellow-labourer, both in this epistle to the Colossians, and in that to Philemon, I apprehend Demas had repented of his pusillanimity, and was returned to the Apostle and to his duty. This is the second case in which it pleased God to make use of this extraordinary man, St. Paul, for the preservation of the Church. The former instance respected the doctrine of justification, from which even Apostles were indirectly declining: The latter consisted in the exhibition of a godly spirit of zeal, and an open confession of Christ. Such is the sloth and cowardice of man in divine things, and so little need is there to teach us caution and reserve, that unless God now and then stirred up the spirits

* I follow Dr. Lardner in the dates of the epistles, which he has investigated with singular diligence and sagacity; and I once for all acknowledge my repeated obligation to him in things of this nature.

of some eminent Christian heroes, to venture through difficulties, and to stand foremost for the truth against opposition, Satan would bear down all before him. Paul was one of the first of these heroes: and we shall see in every age, that God raises up some persons of this hardy temper, whom worldly men never fail contemptuously to denominate fanatics, because they discover that greatness of soul in a heavenly cause, which, in an earthly one, would excite respect and admiration.

Having obtained his liberty in the year 63, he most probably would soon fulfil his promise to visit the Hebrews; after which he might see his Colossian friends. There is no certain account of his coming either to Jerusalem or to Colosse; but most probably he executed what he had a little before promised. That he ever visited Spain, or our island, is, to say no more, extremely doubtful. Of the last there is a very unfounded report, and of the former no other proof, than the mention of his intention in the epistle to the Romans, which had been written in the year 58, since which time all his measures had been disconcerted. And if he once more made an Asiatic tour after his departure from Rome, there seems not time enough for his accomplishing the western journey, as he suffered martyrdom on his return to Rome about the year 65*. He could have had no great pleasure at Jerusalem: every thing was there hastening to ruin. No man was ever possessed of a more genuine patriotic spirit than this Apostle. The Jewish war, which commenced in 66, would have much afflicted him, had he lived to see it. But returning to Rome about a year before, he fell in with the very time when Rome was burnt, and Christians were accused as incendiaries. He now found no mercy in Nero, who would naturally be displeased at the effect, which he had observed the preaching of the Apostle had produced in his own household.

A. D.
63.A. D.
66.

* Some very respectable Chronologers place the martyrdom of St. Paul, A. D. 67.

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XV.Martyrdom
of Paul.

A cupbearer and a concubine of the emperor had been, through Paul's means, converted to the faith, as Chrysostom assures us : and this hastened his death. He was slain with the sword by Nero's order*.

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63.

He had many fellow-labourers, whose names he has immortalized in his writings. He calls Titus his own son after the common faith†. Timothy was also a particular favourite. Antiquity regards the former as the first bishop of Crete, and the latter as the first bishop of Ephesus. Luke of Antioch, the writer of the third Gospel, and the faithful relater, in the Acts of the Apostles, of this Apostle's transactions, of which he was an eye-witness, is, by him, affectionately denominated the beloved Physician.—He seems to have retired into Greece after St. Paul's first dismissal by the emperor, and there to have written both his inestimable treatises about the year 63 or 64.

Crescens, whom Paul sent to Galatia, is another of his fellow-labourers. Linus, the first bishop of Rome, may be added to the list, and Dionysius the Areopagite of Athens, whom Eusebius reckons the first bishop of the Church in that city.

Character
of St. Paul.

We have now finished the lives of two men, of singular excellence unquestionably, James the Just; and Paul of Tarsus. The former, by his uncommon virtues, attracted the esteem of a whole people, who were full of the strongest prejudices against him: and in regard to the latter, the question may be asked with great propriety, whether such another man ever existed among all those, who have inherited the corrupted nature of Adam? He had evidently a soul large and capacious, and possessed of those seemingly contradictory excellencies which, wherever they appear in combination, fail not to form an extraordinary character. But not only his talents were great and various—his learning also was profound and extensive; and many persons with far inferior abilities and attainments have effected national revolutions, or otherwise distinguished themselves in the history of

* Orosius, B. 7.

† Titus, i. 4.

ankind. His consummate fortitude was tempered with the rarest gentleness, and the most active charity. His very copious and vivid imagination was chastised by the most accurate judgment, and was connected with the closest argumentative powers. Divine grace alone could effect so wonderful a combination; inso-much, that for the space of near thirty years after his conversion, this man, whose natural haughtiness and fiery temper had hurried him into a very sanguinary course of persecution, lived the friend of mankind; returned good for evil continually; was a model of patience and benevolence, and steadily attentive only to heavenly things, while yet he had a taste, a spirit, and a genius, which might have shone among the greatest statesmen and men of letters that ever lived.

We have then in these two men, a strong specimen of what Grace can do, and we may fairly challenge all the infidels in the world, to produce any thing like them in the whole list of their heroes. Yet amidst the constant display of every godly and social virtue, we learn from Paul's own account, that he ever felt himself "carnal, sold under sin," and that sin dwelt in him continually. From his writings we learn, what the depth of human wickedness is: and none of the Apostles seem to have understood so much as he did, the riches of Divine Grace, and the peculiar glory of the Christian religion. The doctrines of election, justification, regeneration, adoption; of the priesthood and offices of Christ, and of the internal work of the Holy Ghost, as well as the most perfect morality founded on Christian principle, are to be found in his writings; and what Quintilian said of Cicero, may be justly applied to the Apostle of the Gentiles: "*Ille se profecisse sciat, cui Paulus valde placebit.*"

During this whole effusion of the Spirit,—of so little account in the sight of God are natural human excellencies and talents,—I see no evidence that any person of extraordinary genius and endowments,

St. Paul excepted, were employed in the divine work of propagating the Gospel. St. Luke, indeed, appears by his writings to have been a classical scholar of a chastised and regular taste; and to approach more nearly to attic purity of diction than any of the New Testament writers. But to St. Paul, the greatness of his conceptions, and the fervour of his zeal, give a magnificent kind of negligence in composition,—in the midst of which there is also, if I mistake not, a vast assemblage of the most sublime excellencies of oratory, which demonstrate how high he might have stood in this line of eminence, had he been ambitious, or rather had he not been perfectly careless of such kind of fame. But that men so unlearned as the rest of the Apostles were,—none of whom appear by nature to have been above the ordinary standard of mankind, though by no means below that standard, ---that such men should have been able of themselves to speak, to act, and to write as they did; and to produce such an amazing revolution in the ideas and manners of mankind, would require the most extravagant credulity to believe.—The power of God is demonstrated from the imbecility of the instruments.

The minds of men void of the love of God are always apt to suspect, as connected with fanaticism, the most precious mysteries of the Gospel, and the whole work of experimental religion. And the more vigorously these things are described, the stronger the suspicion grows. May not this have been one reason why St. Paul was directed to expose himself the most to this unjust censure, by dwelling more copiously than any of the rest of the Apostles on views most directly evangelical;—St. Paul, I say,—because he must be allowed by all who are not willing to betray their own want of discernment, to have been a man of eminent solidity of understanding? If Christian experience be a foolish thing indeed, it is strange that the wisest of all the Christians should have been the most abundant in describing it.

REMAINDER OF FIRST CENTURY.

Of St. Peter we have by no means so large an account as of St. Paul. The last view we have of him in Scripture presents him to us at Antioch. This was probably about the year 50. After this he was employed in spreading the Gospel,—principally among his own countrymen, but one cannot suppose exclusively of Gentiles,—in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. His two epistles were directed to the Hebrew converts of these countries. And if he was far less successful than Paul among the Gentiles, he was much more so than that great man was among the Jews. He, who wrought effectually in Paul among the former, was mighty in Peter among the latter*. It should ever be remembered, who alone did the work, and gave the increase.

Peter probably came to Rome about the year 63. Thence, a little before his martyrdom, he wrote his two epistles. Strange fictions have been invented of his acts at Rome, of which I shall sufficiently testify my disbelief by silence,—the method which I intend constantly to use in things of this nature. It is evident, however, that he here met again with that same Simon the sorcerer, whom he had rebuked long ago in Samaria, and who was practising his sorceries in a much higher style in the metropolis. No doubt the Apostle opposed him successfully; but we have no account of this matter, except a very vague and declamatory one by Eusebius.—At length, when Paul was martyred under Nero, Peter suffered with him by crucifixion with his head downward,—a kind of death which he himself desired,—most probably from an unfeigned humility, that he might not die in the same manner as his Lord had done. Nicephorus informs us, that he had spent two years at Rome. St. Peter, in his second epistle, observes, that his Lord had shown him, that his death was soon to take place. And this gives a degree of credibility to a story of Ambrose related in one of his discourses,

* Gal. ii. 8.

the purport of which is, that the pagans being inflamed against him, the brethren begged him to retreat during the violence of the persecution. Their intreaties, ardent as he was for martyrdom, moved him. He began to go out of the city by night. But coming to the gate*, he saw Christ entering into the city. Whereupon he said, Lord, whither art thou going? Christ answered, I am coming hither to be crucified again. Peter hence understood that Christ was to be crucified again in his servant. This induced him voluntarily to return; and he satisfied the minds of the brethren with this account, and was soon after seized and crucified. Whoever considers the very solemn manner in which our Lord foretold the violent death of this Apostle, in the close of St. John's Gospel; and that, in his second epistle, he himself declares that his divine Master had shown him, that he should quickly put off his tabernacle, will find no difficulty in conceiving, that the vision† now related from Ambrose might have taken place a little before the writing of this epistle; and, that the writing of the epistle may have a little time preceded his seizure and violent death. I mention this as a probable conjecture only. The story itself is consonant to the miraculous powers then in the Church; and its evidence rests on the character of Ambrose himself, an Italian bishop, whose integrity and understanding are equally respectable.

Peter's wife had been called to martyrdom a little before himself. He saw her led to death; and rejoiced at the grace of God vouchsafed to her; and addressing her by name, exhorted and comforted her with "Remember the Lord‡."

There are two striking attestations to the character of St. Peter, which may be fairly drawn from the

* Sermon cont. Aux. i. 11.

† There is no necessity to consider Christ's appearance as any thing more than a vision.

‡ Clement. Strom. 7.

sacred writings. As it is allowed on all hands, that he authorized the publication of St. Mark's Gospel, had he been disposed to spare his own character, he would not have suffered the shameful denial of his Master to have been described, as it is in that Evangelist, with more aggravated circumstances of guilt, and with fainter views of his repentance, than are to be found in the other Evangelists. I am indebted for the other remark to Bishop Gregory, the first of that name. In his second epistle, St. Peter gives the most honourable attestation to the Apostle Paul's epistles, though he must know that in one of them—that to the Galatians—his own conduct on a particular occasion was censured. This is evidently above nature. The most unfeigned humility appears to have been an eminent part of the character of this Apostle, who, in his early days, was remarkable for the violence of his temper. His natural character was no uncommon one. Frank, open, active, courageous; sanguine in his attachments and in his passions; no way deficient, but not eminent, in understanding,—a plain honest man; yet, by grace and supernatural wisdom, rendered an instrument of the greatest good in the conversion of numbers, and only inferior to St. Paul.—He seems to have lived long in a state of matrimony; and by Clement's account, was industrious in the education of his children.

Mark was sister's son to Barnabas, the son of Mary, a pious woman of Jerusalem. He was probably brought up in Christianity from early life; and his conduct, for some time, gives credibility to an opinion, tolerably confirmed by experience, that early converts, or those who have been religiously brought up, do not make that vigorous progress in divine things generally, which those do, whose conversion has commenced after a life of much sin and vanity. Their views are apt to be comparatively faint, and their dispositions in religion languid and indolent. We are told by Epiphanius, that Mark was one of those

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Mark was
at Rome
with Paul :

A. D.
62.

who were offended at the words of Christ recorded in the 6th chapter of St. John; and that he then forsook him, but was afterwards recovered to his Saviour by means of Peter. After our Lord's ascension, he attended his uncle Barnabas with Paul; but soon left them and returned to Jerusalem. Barnabas however hoping the best from one, whom he held so dear, proposed him to Paul as their companion on some future occasion. After the rupture, which this occasioned, between the two Apostles, Barnabas took him as his companion to Cyprus. Undoubtedly his character improved. Some plants are slow of growth, but attain at length great vigour, and bear much fruit. Even Paul himself, who had been so much offended with him, at length declared, "he is profitable to me for the ministry*." From the epistle to the Colossians, it is evident that he was with the Apostle in his imprisonment at Rome. This was in the year 62. His Gospel was written by the desire of the believers at Rome about two years after. I know not when to fix the time of his coming to Egypt. But he is allowed to have founded the Church of Alexandria, and to have been buried there. He was succeeded by Anianus, of whom Eusebius gives the highest eulogium. It is evident that the society of those three great men, Barnabas, Paul, and Peter, at different times, was very useful to him. Probably his natural indolence needed such incentives. In Mark then we seem to have noticed one of the first promoters of Christianity, of a cast of mind different from any we have hitherto reviewed.—The variety of tempers and talents employed in the service of God, and sanctified by the same divine energy, affords a field of speculation neither unpleasing nor unprofitable.

Of the labours of nine Apostles, James, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Jude, Simon, and Matthias, scarcely any thing is recorded.

* 2 Tim. iv. 2.

Of John the Apostle a few valuable fragments may be collected. He was present at the council of Jerusalem, which was held about the year 50: nor is it probable, that he left Judea till that time. Asia Minor was the great theatre of his ministry, particularly Ephesus, the care of which Church remained with him after the decease of the rest of the Apostles. The breaking out of the war in Judea most probably obliged the Apostle to bid a total farewell to his native country.—While he resided at Ephesus, going once to bathe there, he perceived that Cerinthus was in the bath: He came out again hastily: Let us flee, says he, lest the bath should fall, while Cerinthus, an enemy of truth, is within it. The same story is told of Ebion as well as of Cerinthus: they were both heretics, and of a similar character: and it is an easy mistake for a reporter of the story to confound names; but if the whole should have had no foundation, it is not easy to account for the fiction. The testimony of Irenæus, who had it from persons who received their information from Polycarp the disciple of St. John, seems sufficiently authentic. Irenæus, a man of exquisite judgment, evidently believed the story himself; and surely the opinion of such a person, who lived near those times, must outweigh the fanciful criticisms and objections of modern authors. The fashion of the present age, humanely sceptical, and clothing profane indifference with the name of candour, is ever ready to seduce even good men into a disbelief of facts of this nature, however well attested. But let the circumstances of St. John be well considered. He was a surviving apostolical luminary. Heretical pravity was deeply spreading its poison. Sentiments, very derogatory to the person, work, and honour of Jesus Christ, were diffused with great perverseness of industry. What should have been the deportment of this truly benevolent Apostle? I doubt not but he was ever forward to relieve personal distresses: but to have joined the

Council of
Jerusalem
A. D.
50.

company of the principal supporters of heresy, would have been to countenance it. He well knew the arts of seducers. They were ready always to avail themselves of the seeming countenance of Apostles or of apostolical men; and thence to take an opportunity of strengthening themselves, and of diffusing their poison. Such has been their conduct in all ages. Having no ground of their own to stand on, they have continually endeavoured to rest on the authority of some great man of allowed evangelical respectability. This artful management, clothed with the pretence of charity, points out to the real friends of the Lord Jesus, what they ought to do, from motives of real benevolence to mankind,—namely, to bear patiently the odious charge of bigotry, and to take every opportunity of testifying their abhorrence of heretical views and hypocritical actions. Humanly speaking, I see not how divine truth is to be supported in the world, but by this procedure; and I scruple not to say, that St. John's conduct appears not only defensible, but laudable, and worthy the imitation of Christians. It is agreeable to what he himself declares in one of his short epistles, addressed to a Christian lady,—that if “any come to her house, and bring not the true doctrine of the Gospel, she ought not to receive him, nor bid him God speed; because to bid him God speed, would make her partake of his evil deeds.” His menacing language concerning Diotrophes, in the other epistle to Gaius, breathes, what some would call, the same uncharitable spirit. And when I see St. Paul shaking his garment against the infidel Jews, and hear him saying, “Your blood be on your own heads, I am clean;” and when I find him warning the Galatians thus, “If an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine, let him be accursed,” and wishing that they which troubled them, “were even cut off,”—I am instructed how to judge of the indignation of holy St. John against Cerinthus.

Indeed the primitive Christians were even more careful to avoid the society of false Christians than of open unbelievers. With the latter they had, at times, some free intercourse; with the former they refused even to eat*.—We have already seen, how our Saviour commends the impatience and discernment of the Ephesians, who could not bear false professors.—They had tried those who call themselves “Apostles, and are not; and had found them liars.”

It is one of the designs of this History, to show the actual conduct of real Christians in life and conversation: and the relation before us, of John's behaviour to Cerinthus, illustrates this. But,—if we must so far humour the taste of Socinians and sceptics as to allow ourselves to doubt the existence of well-attested facts because they contradict the fashionable torrent, we shall injure the faithfulness of history, make present manners the standard of credibility, and practically adopt a very absurd modish position,—that the divine charity of a sound Christian, is the same thing as the refined humanity of a philosophical heretic.—I would ask any person, to whom the infection of modern manners renders this reasoning of difficult digestion, whether he ought more to approve of the conduct of one gentleman who should mix in easy familiarity with a company of murderers, or of another who should fly from it with horror. If we believe spiritual murderers, who labour to ruin souls by propagating Antichristian views, to be still more pernicious than the former, we shall not be under any difficulty in vindicating St. John.

The unreasonable doubts that have arisen in our times concerning the fact we have been considering, appear to me to originate in a spirit of heresy. There is another fact, respecting the same Apostle, which comes before us loaded with similar sceptical objections; and these are to be ascribed, I fear, to the

1 Cor. v. 10, 11.

prevalence of deism. Tertullian* tells us, that, by order of Domitian, John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil, and came out again without being hurt. This must have happened, most probably, during the latter part of the reign of that emperor; and Tertullian was certainly competent to relate such a fact as this:—Yet it is now generally disbelieved or doubted. Is it because we see no miracles in our own times? Let the reader transport himself into the first century; and he will see no more improbability, in the nature of the thing, that a miracle should be wrought in favour of St. John, than in favour of Paul, as recorded in the last chapter of the Acts. The miracle softened not the heart of Domitian, who would probably suppose the Apostle to have been fortified by magical incantations. He banished him into the solitary isle of Patmos, where he was favoured with the visions of the Apocalypse. After Domitian's death, he returned from Patmos, and governed the Asiatic churches. There he remained till the time of Trajan. At the request of the bishops, he went to the neighbouring churches, partly to ordain pastors, and partly to regulate the congregations. At one place in his tour, observing a youth of a remarkably interesting countenance, he warmly recommended him to the care of a particular pastor. The young man was baptized; and, for a time, lived as a Christian. But being gradually corrupted by company, he became idle and intemperate; and at length so dishonest, as to become a captain of a band of robbers. Some time after John had occasion to inquire of the pastor concerning the young man, who told him, that he was now dead to God; and that he inhabited a mountain over against his church †. John, in the vehemence of his charity, went to the place, and exposed himself to be taken by the robbers. “Bring me, says he, to your captain.” The young robber beheld him coming; and as soon as he knew the aged and venerable

* Præscript. Hær.

† Clem. Alex. apud Euseb.

Apostle, he was struck with shame, and fled.--St. John followed him and cried, My son, why fliest thou from thy father, unarmed and old? Fear not; as yet there remaineth hope of salvation. Believe me, Christ hath sent me. Hearing this, the young man stood still, trembled, and wept bitterly. John prayed, exhorted, and brought him back to the society of Christians; nor did he leave him, till he judged him fully restored by Divine Grace.

CENT.
I.

Even the truth of this last relation has been questioned by Basnage. But as I know no reason for hesitation, I shall leave it with the serious reader, who loves to behold the tokens of Grace from age to age dispensed to sinners.

We have yet another story of St. John, short, but pleasing, and which has had the good fortune to pass uncontradicted. Being now very old, and unable to say much in Christian assemblies, "Children, love one another," was his constantly repeated sermon. Being asked, why he told them only one thing, he answered, that "nothing else was needed." This account rests on the single testimony of Jerom, so far as I have found. But as it seems to fall in with the spirit of the age more than the others, its truth is allowed. We may hence observe how little regard is paid to real evidence by many critics, who seem to make modern manners the test of historical credibility. Whatever fact shows the spirit of zeal, the reality of miracles, or the work of the Divine Spirit on the heart, must be questioned: What indicates feeling or humanity, this only must be allowed to stand its ground. In truth, I should be sorry to have so beautiful a story called in question; but its evidences are by no means superior to those of the three former.

John lived three or four years after his return to Asia, having been preserved to the age of almost a hundred years, for the benefit of the Church of Christ, an inestimable pattern of charity and goodness.

Of the Apostle Barnabas nothing is known, except what is recorded in the Acts. There we have an honourable encomium of his character, and a particular description of his joint labours with St Paul. It is a great injury to him, to apprehend the epistle, which goes by his name, to be his.

The work of Hermas, though truly pious and probably written by the person mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans, is yet a composition of inferior merit; nor is it worth while to detain the reader concerning it. Indeed we have no ecclesiastical work, exclusive of the Scriptures, except one, which does any peculiar honour to the first century. To believe, to suffer, to love,—not to write, was the primitive taste.

The work which I except is Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. This is he, whom Paul calls his fellow-labourer, whose "name is in the book of life*." He long survived Paul and Peter, and was no doubt a blessing to the Roman Church, over which he presided nine years. His epistle was read in many primitive churches, and was admired exceedingly by the antients. It has a simplicity and a plainness, not easily relished by a systematic modern; but there belongs to it, also, a wonderful depth of holiness and wisdom. A few quotations relating to its history, its doctrine, and its spirit, will not improperly close this account of the pastors of the first century.

Its history will bring again to our view the Church of Corinth, which we have already seen distracted with schisms and contentions, and more disgracing its high calling with secular ambition than any other primitive Church. From the testimony of Clement it appears that St. Paul's two epistles had been abundantly useful; and that he had reason to rejoice in the confidence which he reposed in the sincerity of profession, which prevailed in many of them, notwithstanding these evils. The account which he gives of their good situation, may justly be considered as the

* Phillip. iv.

proper fruit of apostolical admonitions.—“What strangers that came among you, did not take honourable notice formerly of the firmness and fulness of your faith? Who of them did not admire the sobriety and gentleness of your godly spirit in Christ? Who did not extol the liberal practice of your Christian hospitality? How admirable was your sound and mature knowledge of divine things? Ye were wont to do all things without respect to persons; and ye walked in the ways of God in due subjection to your pastors, and submitting yourselves the younger to the elder. Ye charged young men to attend to the gravity and moderation becoming the Christian character; young women to discharge their duties with a blameless, holy, and chaste conscientiousness; to love their husbands with all suitable tenderness and fidelity; and to guide the house in all soberness and gravity. Then ye all showed a humble spirit, void of boasting and arrogance, more ready to obey than to command, more ready to give than to receive. Content with the divine allotments, and attending diligently to the word of Christ, ye were enlarged in your bowels of love; and his sufferings on the cross were before your eyes. Hence a profound and happy peace was imparted to you all; an unwearied desire of doing good, and a plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost was with you. Full of holy counsel, in all readiness of mind, with godly assurance of faith, ye stretched forth your hands to the Lord Almighty, intreating him to be gracious to you, if in any thing ye unwillingly offended. Your care was, day and night, for all the brethren: that the number of his elect might be saved in mercy and a good conscience. Ye were indeed sincere and harmless, and forgiving one another. All dissension and schism in the Church was abominable to you: ye mourned over the faults of your neighbours; ye sympathized with their infirmities as your own; ye were unwearied in all goodness, and ready to every good work. Adorned with a venerable and upright conversation,

ye performed all things in his fear; and the law of God was written deep indeed on the tables of your hearts."

It is pleasing to see this numerous Church, of whom our Saviour had so long ago declared that "he had much people in this city," toward the close of the century, still alive in the faith, hope, and charity of the Gospel, free in a great degree from the evils, which had cost St. Paul so much care and grief, and preserving the vigour of true Christianity. But history must be faithful: and their decline is described in the same epistle. Pride and a schismatical spirit, which have since tarnished so many churches, and which were evils particularly Corinthian, defaced this agreeable picture. But let Clement speak for himself:

"Thus, when all glory and enlargement were given to you, that Scripture was fulfilled, 'Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.' Hence envy, strife, dissension, persecution, disorder, war, and desolation have seized your church. 'The child has behaved himself proudly against the antient, and the base against the honourable, the mean against the eminent, and the foolish against the wise.' Hence righteousness and peace are far from you; because ye all leave the fear of God; and your spiritual sight is become too dim to be guided by the faith of the Gospel. Ye walk not in his ordinances, nor walk worthy of the Lord Christ; but ye all walk too much according to your own evil lusts, nourishing and cherishing a malignant spirit of envy, by which the first death came into the world."

The schism pregnant with so many evils gave occasion to this epistle. It seems the distracted Corinthians asked counsel of the Church of Rome; and her venerable pastor wrote this epistle in consequence of their request. He apologizes, indeed, for the delay of writing, which he imputes to the afflictions and distresses which befel the Christians of Rome *, most

* The 2d Persecution of the Christians, was by Domitian A. D. 95.

probably on account of Domitian's persecution, the letter itself being written about the year 94, or 95. In these times the sin of schism was looked on with the greatest horror. Clement calls the promoters of it, "the haughty, disorderly leaders of the abominable schism."—It is no trifling guilt, which men incur, by precipitately giving themselves up to the will of those, whose aim is strife and the advancement of a sect or party, not the interest of godliness. He speaks of persons, who talk of peace with their lips, while their conduct shows, that they love to break the unity of the Church; like the hypocrite, who draws nigh to "the Lord with his lips, while his heart is far from him."

The attentive reader cannot but observe, how the same evil prevails in our days to the great injury of real piety; and yet how little it is deplored; rather, how much encouraged and promoted by specious representations of liberty, of the right of private judgment, of a just contempt of implicit faith, and of pleas of conscience. Doubtless, from these topics there are deducible arguments of great moment, and which deserve the most serious attention in practical concerns: but, at present, it is not my province to explain the middle path in this subject, nor to prove that modern evangelical Churches are far gone into the vicious extreme of schism.

Vera rerum VOCABULA amisimus.

However some persons may triumph in effecting separations from FAITHFUL pastors, it is a shameful and an unchristian practice: and perhaps humble spirits may, from Clement himself, acquire sufficient instruction, how to discriminate the spirit of conscientious zeal from that of schism, and to know when they ought not to separate from the Church to which they belong.

"The Apostles," says he, "with the greatest care ordained the rulers of the Church, and delivered a rule of succession in future, that after their decease

other approved men might succeed. Those then who, by them, or in succession by other choice, were ordained rulers with the approbation and concurrence of the whole Church; and who in a blameless conduct have ministered to the flock of Christ in humility; who for a series of years have been well reported of by all men, these we think it unrighteous to deprive of the ministry. Nor is it a sin of small magnitude, to eject from the sacred office men whose ministry hath been thus blameless and holy. Happy those presbyters, who have finished their course, and have departed in peace and in the fruitful discharge of their duties! They at least, remote from envy and faction, are not subject to popular caprice, nor exposed to the danger of out-living the affections of their flocks, and their own unfruitfulness. We see with grief, brethren, that ye have deprived of the ministry some of your godly pastors, whose labours for your souls deserved a different treatment." And he goes on to show, that godly men in Scripture "were indeed persecuted, but by the wicked; were imprisoned, but by the unholy; were stoned, but by the enemies of God; were murdered, but by the profane. Was Daniel cast into the den of lions by men who feared God? Were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace by men, who worshipped the Most High?"

Schisms
among the
Corinthians.

What the sin of schism is,—in what manner the Corinthians were guilty of it,—and how far all this is applicable to the case of Churches at this day, will need but little comment.

Clement afterwards reminds them of their former guilt in St. Paul's time. "Do take up the writings of the blessed Apostle; what did he say to you in the beginning of the Gospel? Truly, by Divine Inspiration, he gave you directions concerning himself, and Cephas and Apollos, because even then ye were splitting into parties. But your party-spirit at that time had less evil in it, because it was

exercised in favour of Apostles of eminent holiness, and of one much approved of by them. But now consider who they are that have subverted you, and broken the bonds of brotherly love. These are shameful things, brethren, very shameful? Oh, tell it not on Christian ground, that the ancient and flourishing Church of Corinth have quarrelled with their pastors, from a weak partiality for one or two persons. This rumour hath not only reached us Christians, but is spread among infidels: so that the name of God is blasphemed through your folly; and your own spiritual health is endangered indeed." After exhorting them with much pathos to heal the breaches, he, toward the close, beseeches them—"to send back our messengers shortly in peace with joy, that they may quickly bring us the news of your concord, which we so ardently long for; that we may speedily rejoice on your account."

What effect on the Corinthians this kind animadversion produced we know not: The whole history of the schism certainly deserved to be noticed: It is related by the faithful pen of Clement; and the spirit of declension from simple Christianity, and the way by which the Spirit of God is commonly provoked to depart from churches once flourishing in holiness, are well described. Human nature appears to have been always the same: And this example affords a standing admonition to Christian churches to beware of that nice, factious, and licentious spirit, which, under pretence of superior discernment and regard for liberty of conscience, has often broken the bonds of peace, and sometimes subjected the best of pastors to suffer, from a people professing godliness, what might have been expected only from persons altogether impious and profane.

No apology, I trust, can be necessary for laying before the reader, from the same excellent author, the following occasional exhortation. "Set before your eyes the holy Apostles.—Through the enmity

human heart Peter underwent a variety of afflictions; and having suffered martyrdom, departed to the due place of glory. Through the hatred of a wicked world Paul having been scourged, stoned, and seven times cast into prison, obtained at length the reward of his patience: Having preached the Gospel in the east and west, he obtained a good report through faith: Having preached righteousness to the utmost bounds of the west, and having suffered martyrdom from princes, he left this world, and reached the shore of a blessed immortality:—He was an eminent pattern of those, who suffer for righteousness sake. By the godly conversation and labours of these men, a great multitude of the elect was gathered together; who, through similar hatred of the world, were afflicted with cruel torments, and obtained a similar good report among us through faith. Through the operation of the same principle, even women among us have sustained the most cruel and unrighteous sufferings, and finished in patient faith their course, and received notwithstanding the weakness of their sex, the prize of Christian heroines.”

The nature of the epistle being practical, and those to whom it was written not being corrupted in their sentiments, much of doctrine by accurate exposition and enforcement is not to be expected. Yet the fundamentals of godliness are very manifest: Salvation ONLY by the blood of Christ, the necessity of repentance in all men,—because all men are guilty before God,—THESE GREAT TRUTHS he supposes, and builds on continually. “Let us steadfastly behold the blood of Christ, and see how precious it is in the sight of God, which being shed for our salvation, hath procured the Grace of Repentance for all the world.”

And the nature and necessity of lively faith, as a principle of all true goodness and happiness, and perfectly distinct from the dead historical assent, with which it is by many so unhappily confounded, is well

REMAINDER OF FIRST CENTURY.

illustrated in the case of Lot's wife. "She had another spirit, another heart: hence, she was made a monument of the Lord's indignation, a pillar of salt to this day; that all the earth in all generations may know, that the double-minded, who stagger at the promises of God, and distrust the power of grace in unbelief, shall obtain nothing of the Lord, but the signal display of his vengeance."

The divine dignity and glory of our Saviour, is well described in these words: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sceptre of the Majesty of God, came not in the pomp of arrogance or pride; for, notwithstanding his power, he was meek and lowly."

The doctrine of Election, in connexion with holiness, as the Scripture always states it, appears remarkably distinct in this epistle. A passage may properly be introduced here, to show that it was a primitive doctrine, and made use of for the promotion of a holy life:

"Let us go to him in sanctification of heart, lifting up holy hands to him, influenced by the love of our gracious and compassionate Father, who hath made us for himself a portion of the election. For thus it is written, 'When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, and as it were separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of his servants. The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the cord of his inheritance.'" And in another place he says, 'Behold the Lord taketh to himself a nation from the midst of the nations, as a man taketh to himself the first fruits of his threshing floor; and from that nation shall proceed the most holy things.'

"Since therefore we are the HOLY ONE's portion, let us be careful to abound in all things which appertain to holiness*."

But the distinguishing doctrine of Christianity, without which indeed the Gospel is a mere name,

* Ep. ad Cor. 1. 29 sect.

and incapable of consoling sinners, is doubtless justification by the Grace of Christ through faith alone.— See the following testimony to it in this author. It deserves to be distinctly remembered, as an unequivocal proof of the faith of the primitive Church.

“ All these,” he is speaking of the Old Testament fathers, “ were magnified and honoured, not through themselves, not through their own works, not through the righteous deeds which they performed, but through HIS WILL. And we also by his will being called in Christ Jesus, are JUSTIFIED not by ourselves, nor, by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or by the works which we have wrought in holiness of heart, but by FAITH ;—by which the Almighty hath justified all, who are or have been justified from the beginning.”

His quick perception of the common objection,— what need then of good works?—his ready answer to it, and his manner of stating the NECESSITY of good works, and of placing them on their proper basis, show how deeply he had studied, and how exquisitely he relished and felt St. Paul’s doctrines :—

“ But what then ? Shall we neglect good works ? Does it hence follow, that we should leave the law of loving obedience ? God forbid ;—let us rather hasten with all earnestness of mind to every good work ; for the Lord himself rejoices in his works. Having such a pattern, how strenuously should we follow his will, and work the works of righteousness with all our might.”

The doctrine of the work of the Spirit on the heart, and of the experience of his consolations in the soul, which, in our days, is so generally charged with enthusiasm, appears from the following passage :

“ How blessed, how amazing the gifts of God ; beloved ! Life in immortality,—splendour in righteousness,—truth in liberty,—faith in assurance,—sobriety in holiness !—And thus far in this life we know experimentally. If the earnestness of the Spirit be so

precious, what must be the things which God hereafter hath prepared for them that wait for him?"

I forbear to produce his views of the resurrection, and his beautiful manner of supporting the doctrine by the analogy of nature, after the manner of St. Paul. His mistake in applying the story of the Arabian Phoenix has been, I think, too severely censured. None in truth ought to censure it as a blemish, except those who can so much compliment their own sagacity, as to say, that they in like circumstances would not have done the same. If the fact had been true, it doubtless would have afforded a happy illustration of the doctrine of a resurrection. The story was generally believed in his days. That Clement believed it, is no proof of weakness of judgment: and nobody contends, that his epistle, in the proper and strict sense of the word, is written by inspiration.

What men are by nature,—how dark and miserable;—what they become by converting grace in the renewal of the understanding, is thus expressed: "Through him, that is, through Jesus Christ, let us behold the glory of God shining in his face: Through him the eyes of our hearts were opened: Through him our understanding, dark and foolish as it was, rises again into his marvellous light: Through him the Lord would have us to taste of immortal knowledge."

This epistle seems to come as near to apostolical simplicity, as any thing we have on record: The illustration of its spirit would show this abundantly. It is difficult to do this by single passages: A temper so heavenly, meek, holy, charitable, patient, yet fervent, pious, and humble, runs through the whole. The following specimen deserves the reader's notice:

"Christ is their's, who are poor in spirit, and lift not up themselves above the flock; but are content to be low in the Church."—"Let us obey our spiritual pastors, and honour our elders, and let the younger be disciplined in the fear of God. Let our wives be

directed to what is good ; to follow chastity, modesty, meekness, sincerity. Let them evidence their power of self-government by their silence ; and let them show love, not in the spirit of a sect or party, but to all who fear God." Again, " Let not the strong despise the weak : and let the weak reverence the strong. Let the rich communicate to the poor ; and let the poor be thankful to God, for those through whom their wants are supplied. Let the wise exert his wisdom, not merely in words, but in good works. Let the humble prove his humility, not by testifying of himself how humble he is ; but by a conduct, that may occasion others to give testimony to him : Let not the chaste be proud of his chastity, knowing that from God he has received the gift of continency." " Have we not all one God, one Christ, one Spirit of Grace poured upon us, and one calling in Christ ? Why do we separate and distract the members of Christ, and fight against our own body, and arrive at such a height of madness as to forget that we are members one of another."

" Is any among you strong in faith, mighty in knowledge, gifted in utterance, judicious in doctrines, and pure in conduct ? The more he appears exalted above others, the more need has he to be poor in spirit ; and to take care, that he look not to his own things ; but that he study to promote the common good of the Church."

" Every one, whose heart has any good degree of the fear and love, which is the result of our common hope, would rather that he himself be exposed to censure than his neighbours ; and would rather condemn himself, than break that beautiful bond of brotherly love, which is delivered to us."

After pressing the beautiful example of the charity of Moses recorded in the book of Exodus*, he says, " Who of you has any generosity of sentiment, or bowels of compassion, or fulness of love ? Let

* Ex. xxxii.

him say, if the strife and schism be on my account: I will depart, wherever you please, and perform whatever the Church shall require. Only let Christ's flock live in peace with their settled pastors. Surely the Lord will smile on such a character*."

CENT

L

III. The reader will not expect that I should solicitously register the names, and record the opinions and acts of those who are commonly called heretics.—I have only to view them in one single light, namely, as they deviated from the SPIRIT of the Gospel. Let us keep in view what that really is. The simple faith of Christ as the only Saviour of lost sinners, and the effectual influences of the Holy Ghost in recovering souls altogether depraved by sin,—these are the leading ideas.

Heresies
of the first
Century

When the effusion of the Holy Ghost first took place, these things were taught with power; and no sentiments, which militated against them, could be supported for a moment. As, through the prevalence of human corruption and the crafts of Satan, the love of the truth was lessened, heresies and various abuses of the Gospel appeared: and in estimating them, we may form some idea of the declension of true religion toward the end of the century, which doubtless was not confined to the Jewish Church, but appears, in a measure, to have affected the Gentiles also.

The epistolary part of the New Testament affords but too ample proof of corruptions. The Apostle Paul guards the Romans against false teachers, one mark of whose character was, that "by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple†." Corinth was full of evils of this kind. There false apostles transformed themselves into the appearance of real ones. The Jewish corruption of self-

* Such sentiments as these, coming from the pen of a writer, whom St. Paul (4 ch. Phil. & 3d v.) describes as his fellow-labourer, and also as one whose name is in the book of life, cannot fail to be grateful to every sound and pious Christian.

† Rom. xvi.

righteousness, which threatened the destruction of the Galatian Church, has been distinctly considered. Many Christians, so called, walked as enemies of the cross of Christ, “ whose end was destruction, whose god was their belly, whose glory was in their shame, who minded earthly things *.” So Paul tells the Philippians, and with tears of charity.—The epistle to the Colossians proves, that pretty strong symptoms of that amazing mass of austerities and superstitions by which, in after ages, the purity of the faith was so much clouded, and of that self-righteousness which superseded men’s regard to the mediation of Jesus and the glory of Divine Grace, had begun to discover themselves, even in the Apostles’ days.

The prophecy of Antichrist, in the first epistle of Timothy, chapter the fourth, expressly intimates, that its spirit had already commenced by the excessive esteem of celibacy and abstinence. The corrupt mixtures of vain philosophy had also seduced some from the faith. Under the gradual increase of these complicated evils, a meaner religious taste was formed, at least in several churches, which could even bear to admire such injudicious writers as Hermas and the Pseudo-Barnabas†.—Peter, and Jude‡, have graphically described certain horrible enormities of nominal Christians, little, if at all, inferior to the most scandalous vices of the same kind in these latter ages. The spirit of schism we have seen again breaking out in the Church of Corinth.—But let us observe more distinctly the HERETICAL opinions of the first century.

Ecclesiastical historians, who have passed by the most glorious scenes of real Christianity, have yet with minute accuracy given us the lists of heretics, subtilized by refined subdivisions without end. It seems more useful to notice them, as they stand contradistinguished to that FAITH which was once delivered to the saints. Tertullian reduces the heretics of the apostolic times to two classes, the

* Philipp. iii.

† 2 Pet.

‡ Jude’s Epistle.

Docetæ, and the Ebionites. Theodoret also gives the same account of them.

CH
I

Of the instruments of Satan in these things, Simon, who had been rebuked by Peter in Samaria, was the most remarkable; he was the father of the Gnostics or Docetæ, and of a number of heretical opinions and practices of the first century. However obscure the history of Simon himself may be, the leading opinions of the Docetæ are sufficiently obvious. They held that the Son of God had no proper humanity, and that he died on the cross only in appearance.—Cerinthus allowed him a real human nature: he considered JESUS as a man born of Joseph and Mary; but supposed that CHRIST,—whom yet all the heretics looked on as properly inferior to the supreme God,—descended from heaven, and united himself to the man Jesus.

The Ebionites were not much different from the Cerinthians: they removed the appearance of mystery from the subject: In general they looked on Jesus Christ as a mere man born of Mary and her husband, though a man of a most excellent character.—Whoever thinks it needful to examine these things more nicely, may consult Irenæus and Eusebius: The account of Ebion in the latter is short, but sufficiently clear.

It is not to be wondered at, that with such low ideas of the Redeemer's person, the Ebionites denied the virtue of his atoning blood; and laboured to establish justification by the works of the law. Their rejection of the divine authority of St. Paul's epistles, and their accusation of him as an Antinomian, naturally arise from their system. Tertullian tells us, that this was a Jewish sect: and their observance of Jewish rites makes his account the more credible.

These two heretical schemes, the one opposing the humanity of Christ, the other annihilating the divinity, were the inventions of men leaning to their

own understandings, and unwilling to admit the great mystery of godliness, —“ God manifest in the flesh.” The primitive Christians held, that the Redeemer was both God and man, equally possessed of the real properties of both natures; and no man, willing to take his creed from the New Testament, ever thought otherwise; the proofs of both natures in one person, Christ Jesus, being abundantly diffused through the sacred books. One single verse in the ninth chapter to the Romans*, expressing both, is sufficient to confound all the critical powers of heretics: and therefore, on the slightest grounds, they have been compelled to have recourse to their usual method of suspecting the soundness of the sacred text. The only real difficulty in this subject is, for man to be brought to believe, on divine authority, that doctrine, the grounds of which we cannot comprehend. Though we have just as good reason to doubt the union of soul and body in man, from our equal ignorance of the bond of that union, yet proud men, unacquainted with the internal misery and depravity of nature, which renders a complete character, like that of Christ, so divinely suitable to our wants, and so exactly proper to mediate between God and man, soon discovered a disposition to oppose the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus; and, as there were two ways of doing this—by taking away either one or the other of the two natures—we see at once the origin of the two sects before us. The doctrine of the atonement was opposed by both;—by the Docetæ in their denial of the real human nature of Jesus; and by the Ebionites in their denial of the Divine Nature, which stamps an infinite value on his sufferings.

Such were the perversions of the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement of the Son of God. Nor did the doctrine of justification by faith only, which St. Paul had so strenuously supported, escape a

* Verse 5. Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

similar treatment. In all ages this doctrine has been either fiercely opposed, or basely abused. The epistle to the Galatians describes the former treatment; the epistle of Jude the latter.—The memoirs of these heretics, short and imperfect as they are, inform us of some, who professed an extraordinary degree of sanctity, and affected to be abstracted altogether from the flesh, and to live in excessive abstemiousness. We find also that there were others, who, as if to support their Christian liberty, lived in sin with greediness, and indulged themselves in all the gratifications of sensuality. Nothing short of a spiritual illumination and direction can indeed secure the improvement of the grace of the Gospel to the real interests of holiness. At this day there are persons, who think that the entire renunciation of all our own works in point of dependence must be the destruction of practical religion; and they are thence led to seek salvation “by the works of the law:” while others, admitting IN WORDS the grace of Jesus Christ, encourage themselves in open sin. A truly humbled frame, and a clear insight into the beauty of holiness, through the effectual influence of the Divine Spirit, will teach men to live a sanctified life by the faith of Jesus. The Gentile converts by the Gnostic heresy, and the Jewish by that of Ebion, were considerably corrupted towards the close of the century. The latter indeed of these heresies had been gradually making progress for some time. We have seen, that the object of the first council of Jerusalem was to guard men against the imposition of Mosaic observances, and to teach them to rely only on the grace of Christ for salvation. But self-righteousness is a weed of too quick a growth to be easily eradicated. The Pharisaic Christians, we may apprehend, were not immediately advanced to the full size of heresy. But when they proceeded to reject St. Paul’s writings, we may fairly conclude, that they fully rejected the article of justification.—

A separation was made; and the Ebionites, as a distinct body of men, deserved the name of heretics.

St. Paul indeed, who, with an eagle's eye, had explored the growing evil, was now no more in the world. But the HEAD of the Church prolonged the life of his favourite John to the extreme age of almost a hundred: and his authority checked the progress of heretical pravity. He resided much at Ephesus, where Paul had declared, that grievous wolves would make their appearance. Jerom says, that he wrote his Gospel at the desire of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus and Ebion. Indeed such expressions as these, "the passover, a feast of the Jews,"—and, "that sabbath day was an high day," seem to indicate that the Jewish policy was now no more, it not being natural to give such explications of customs, except to those who had no opportunity of ocular inspection. I cannot but think, that Dr. Lardner, who is no friend to the vital doctrines of Christianity, has betrayed his predilection for Socinianism, in his attempts to show that St. John in his Gospel did not intend to oppose any particular heresies*. In truth, there are various internal proofs which corroborate the testimony of Jerom. The very beginning of his Gospel is an authoritative declaration of the proper Deity of Jesus Christ: The attentive reader cannot but recollect various discourses to the same purport: The confession of Thomas, after his resurrection, stands single in St. John's gospel: The particular pains, which he takes, to assure us of the real death of his Master, and of the issuing of real blood and water, from his wounded side, are delivered with an air of one, zealous to obviate the error of the Docetæ: Nor can I understand his laying so great a stress on Jesus Christ's coming in the flesh† in any other manner.

* See his Supplement to the Credibility, in the history of St. John.

† 1 John, iv.

While this Apostle lived, the heretics were much discountenanced. And it is certain that Gnostics and Ebionites were always looked on as perfectly distinct from the Christian Church. There needs no more evidence to prove this, than their arrangement by Irenæus and Eusebius under heretical parties. Doubtless they called themselves Christians; and so did all heretics, for obvious reasons: and, for reasons equally obvious, all, who are tender of the fundamentals of Christ's religion, should not own their right to the appellation. Before we dismiss them I would remark,—

1. That it does not appear by any evidence which I can find, that these men were persecuted for their religion. Retaining the Christian name; and yet glorifying man's righteousness, wisdom, and strength, "they spake of the world, and the world heard them." The Apostle John in saying this, had his eye, I believe, on the Docetæ particularly. In our own times persons of a similar stamp would willingly ingratiate themselves with real Christians; and yet at the same time avoid the cross of Christ, and whatever would expose them to the enmity of the world. We have the testimony of Justin Martyr, that Simon was honoured in the pagan world, even to idolatry*.—What stress is laid on this circumstance in the New Testament, as an evidence of the characters of men in religious concerns, is well known.

2. If it be made an objection against evangelical principles, that numbers, who profess them, have run into a variety of abuses, perversions and contentions, we have seen enough, even in the first century, of the same kind of evils to convince us, that such objections militate not against divine truth, but might have been made with equal force against the apostolical age.

3. A singular change in one respect has taken place in the Christian word. The two heretical

* Apud Euseb. B. ii. E. H.

parties above described, were not much unlike the Arians and Socinians at this day. The former have, radically, the same ideas as the Docetæ, though it would be unjust to accuse them of the Antinomian abominations which defiled the followers of Simon : The latter are the very counterpart of the Ebionites. The Trinitarians were then the body of the Church ; and so much superior was their influence and numbers, that the other two were treated as heretics. At present the two parties, who agree in lessening the dignity of Christ, though in an unequal manner, are carrying on a vigorous controversy against one another, while the Trinitarians are despised by both as unworthy the notice of men of reason and letters. Serious and humble minds will, however, insist on the necessity of our understanding that certain fundamental principles are necessary to constitute the real Gospel. The Divinity of Christ,—his atonement,—justification by faith,—regeneration—these they will have observed to be the principles of the primitive Church : and, within this inclosure, the whole of that piety which produced such glorious effects has been confined : and it is worthy the attention of learned men to consider, whether the same remark may not be made in all ages.

IV. Thus have we seen a more astonishing revolution in the human mind and in human manners, than ever took place in any age, effected without any human power, legal or illegal, and even against the united opposition of all the powers then in the world, and this too not in countries rude or uncivilized, but in the most humanized, the most learned, and the most polished part of the globe,—within the Roman empire, no part of which was exempted from a sensible share in its effects.—This empire, within the first century at least, seems to have been the proper limit of Christian conquests*.

* Indeed, that France had any share in the blessings of the Gospel within this century, can only be inferred from the

If an infidel or sceptic can produce any thing like this, effected by Mahometanism or by any other religion of human invention, he may then with some plausibility compare those religions with Christianity: But, as the Gospel stands unrivalled in its manner of subduing the minds of men,—the argument for its divinity, from its propagation in the world, will remain invincible.

And, surely, every dispassionate observer must confess, that the change was from **BAD** to **GOOD**. No man will venture to say, that the religious and moral principles of Jews and Gentiles, before their conversion to Christianity, were good. The idolatries, abominations, and ferocity of the Gentile world will be allowed to have been not less than they are described in the first chapter to the Romans: and the writings of Horace and Juvenal will prove, that the picture is not exaggerated. The extreme wickedness of the Jews is graphically delineated by their own historian, and is neither denied nor doubted by any one. What but the influence of God, and an **EFFUSION** of his Holy Spirit,—the first of the kind since the coming of Christ, and the measure and standard for regulating our views of all succeeding ones,—can account for such a change? From the Acts of the Apostles and their Epistles, I have drawn the greatest part of the narrative; but the little that has been added from other sources is not heterogeneous.—Here are thousands of men turned from the practice of every wickedness to the practice of every virtue: many, very suddenly, or at least in a short space of time, reformed in understanding, in inclination, in affection; knowing, knowledge we have, that it was introduced into Spain. Whether our own country was evangelized at all in this century, is very doubtful. Nor can we be certain that any ministers as yet had passed into Africa. The assertion, therefore, that the Gospel had spread through the Roman empire, must be qualified with a few exceptions, though I think scarcely any more, those, which have been mentioned.

loving, and confiding in God ; from a state of mere selfishness converted into the purest philanthropists ; living only to please God and to exercise kindness toward one another ; and all of them, recovering really, what philosophy only pretended to,—the dominion of reason over passion ; unfeignedly subject to their Maker ; rejoicing in his favour amidst the severest sufferings ; and serenely waiting for their dismissal into a land of blissful immortality. —That all this must be of God, is demonstrative :—but the important inference, which teaches the divine authority of Christ, and the wickedness and danger of despising, or even neglecting him, is not always attended to by those who are most concerned in it.

But the Christian Church was not yet in possession of any external dignity or political importance. No one NATION as yet was Christian, though thousands of individuals were so ;—but those chiefly of the middling and lower ranks. The modern improvements of civil society have taught men, however, that these are the strength of a nation ; and that whatever is praiseworthy is far more commonly diffused among them, than among the noble and great. In the present age then it should be no disparagement to the character of the first Christians, that the Church was chiefly composed of persons too low in life, to be of any weight in the despotic systems of government which then prevailed. We have seen one person* of uncommon genius and endowments, and two † belonging to the Imperial family, but scarcely any more, either of rank or learning, connected with Christianity. We ought not then to be surprised, that Christians are so little noticed by Tacitus and Josephus : These historians are only intent on sublunary and general politics ; they give no attention even to the eternal welfare of individuals.—Nor is this itself a slight exemplification of

* Paul.

† Clemens and Domitilla.

the genius of that religion, which is destined to form men for the next life, and not for this.

CENT.
I.Doctrines
of the
primitive
Christians

In doctrines the primitive Christians agreed: They all worshipped the one living and true God, who made himself known to them in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Each of these they were taught to worship by the very office of baptism performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost:—And the whole economy of grace so constantly reminded them of their obligations to the Father who chose them to salvation, to the Saviour who died for them, and to the Comforter who supported and sanctified them, and was so closely connected with their experience and practice, that they were perpetually incited to worship the Divine Three in One. They all concurred in feeling conviction of sin, of helplessness, of a state of perdition: in relying on the atoning blood, perfect righteousness, and prevalent intercession of Jesus, as their only hope of heaven. Regeneration by the Holy Ghost was their common privilege, and without his constant influence they owned themselves obnoxious only to sin and vanity. Their community of goods, and their love-feasts*, though discontinued at length,—probably because found impracticable,—demonstrated their superlative charity and heavenly-mindedness.—Yet a gloomy cloud hung over the conclusion of the first century.

The first impressions made by the effusion of the Spirit are generally the strongest and the most decisively distinct from the spirit of the world. But human depravity, over-born for a time, arises afresh, particularly in the next generation. Hence the disorders of schism and heresy. Their tendency is to destroy the pure work of God. The first Christians, with the purest charity to the PERSONS of heretics, gave their ERRORS no quarter; but discountenanced them by every reasonable method.

* See Jude's Epistle.

The heretics, on the contrary, endeavoured to unite themselves with Christians. If the same methods be at this day continued;—If the heretic endeavour to promote his false religion by pretended charity, and the Christians stand aloof from him, without dreading the charge of bigotry, each act in character, as their predecessors did. The heretics by weakening men's attachment to Christ, and the schismatics by promoting a worldly and uncharitable spirit, each did considerable mischief; but it was the less, because Christians carefully kept themselves distinct from heretics, and thus set limits to the infection.

It has been of unspeakable detriment to the Christian religion, to conceive that all who profess it, are believers of it, properly speaking. Whereas very many are Christians in NAME only, never attending to the NATURE of the Gospel at all. Not a few glory in sentiments subversive of its genius and spirit: And there are still more who go not so far in opposition to godliness; yet, by making light of the whole work of Grace on the heart, they are found on a strict examination, to be as decidedly void of true Christianity. We have seen the first Christians individually converted: and, as human nature needs the same change still, the particular instances of conversion described in the Acts are models for us at this day. National conversions were then unknown; nor has the term any proper meaning. But when whole countries are supposed to become Christians merely because they are so termed; when conversion of heart is kept out of sight; and when no spiritual fruits are expected to appear in practice;—when such ideas grow fashionable, opposite characters are blended with each other; the form of the Gospel stands, and its power is denied.—But let us not anticipate;—These scenes appeared not in the first century.

CENTURY II.

CHAP. I.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE REIGN OF TRAJAN.

THE master of the Roman world in the beginning of this century was the renowned Trajan. His predecessor Nerva had restored the Christian exiles, and granted a full toleration to the Church. Hence the last of the Apostles had recovered his station at Ephesus, and slept in the Lord, before the short interval of tranquillity was closed by the persecuting spirit of Trajan. Whatever explication may be given or conjectured of the cause of his dislike of Christians, he had a confirmed prejudice against them, and meditated the extinction of the name: nor does it appear that he ever changed his sentiments, or retracted his edicts against them.

There is an account of his persecution in his correspondence with Pliny the governor of Bithynia, a character well known in classical history. The two epistles between the emperor and the governor deserve to be transcribed at length*: they seem to have been written in 106 or 107†.

CENT.
II.

The 3d
Persecution
of the
Christians:

A. D.
106.
or
107.

C. Pliny to Trajan Emperor.

“Health.—It is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things, of which I harbour any doubts, to you. For

Pliny's
letter to
Trajan.

* Pliny's Epistles, x. 97, 98.

† Or perhaps in 102 or 103 of the vulgar æra. The reader will do well to keep in mind, that many disagreements in chronology are accounted for by considering that the Birth of the Saviour is placed by some of the best chronologists before our vulgar æra.

who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of Christians, before I came into this province. I am therefore at a loss, to determine what is the usual object either of inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either of them is to be carried. It has also been with me a question very problematical,—whether any distinction should be made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust;—whether any room should be given for repentance, or the guilt of Christianity once incurred is not to be expiated by the most unequivocal retractation;—whether the name itself, abstracted from any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected with the name, be the object of punishment. In the mean time this has been my method, with respect to those, who were brought before me as Christians. I asked them, whether they were Christians: if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some were infected with the same madness whom, on account of their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to Rome, to be referred to your tribunal. In the course of this business, informations pouring in, as is usual when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An anonymous libel was exhibited, with a catalogue of names of persons, who yet declared, that they were not Christians then, or ever had been; and they repeated after me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which, for this purpose, I had ordered to be brought with the images of the deities: They performed sacred rites with wine and frankincense, and execrated Christ,—none of which things I am told a real

Christian can ever be compelled to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others named by an informer, first affirmed, and then denied the charge of Christianity; declaring that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so, some three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago. All of them worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods, and also execrated Christ. And this was the account which they gave of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the name of crime or error,—namely,—that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, with an obligation of not committing any wickedness;—but on the contrary, of abstaining from thefts, robberies, and adulteries;—also, of not violating their promise, or denying a pledge;—after which it was their custom to separate, and to meet again at a promiscuous harmless meal, from which last practice they however desisted, after the publication of my edict, in which, agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies of that sort. On which account I judged it the more necessary, to inquire, BY TORTURE, from two females, who were said to be deaconesses, what is the real truth. But nothing could I collect, except a depraved and excessive superstition. Deferring therefore any farther investigation, I determined to consult you. For the number of culprits is so great, as to call for serious consultation. Many persons are informed against of every age and of both sexes; and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and to correct it. The success of my endeavours hitherto forbids such despairing thoughts: for the temples, once almost deserted, begin to be frequented, and the sacred rites,

which had long been intermitted, are now attended afresh; and the sacrificial victims are now sold every where, which once could scarcely find a purchaser. Whence I conclude, that many might be reclaimed, were the hope of impunity, on repentance, absolutely confirmed."

Trajan to Pliny.

" You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning Christians. For truly no one general rule can be laid down, which will apply itself to all cases. These people must not be sought after:—If they are brought before you and convicted; let them be capitally punished, yet with this restriction, that if any one renounce Christianity, and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past, he shall obtain pardon for the future, on his repentance. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to; for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and perfectly incongruous to the maxims of my government."

The moral character of Pliny is one of the most amiable in all pagan authority; yet does it appear, that he joined with his master Trajan in his hatred of Christians. In the course of this history, many instances of the same kind will occur. Trajan's character is doubtless much inferior to Pliny's;—it is indeed illustrious by reason of great talents, and great exploits; but by the testimony of Dio, Spartian, and Julian, stained with flagrant vices*; and, as is generally confessed, tarnished by an extravagant ambition. But how is it to be accounted for, that men, who seem enamoured with the beauty of virtue, should turn from it with perfect disgust, and even persecute it with rancour, when it appears in the most genuine colours? Let those who imagine such

* See Lardner's Collection, v. ii. c.

men as Pliny to be good and virtuous in the proper sense of the words, try to solve this phenomenon on their own principles. On those of the real Gospel the question is not hard to be determined. Admitting that Pliny might at first be prejudiced against Christians from misrepresentation, how happens it, that he continues so after better information, even when he is convinced that no moral evil is to be found in the Christians of Bithynia, that their meetings are peaceable, and the ends aimed at by them, not only innocent, but laudable? The truth is, virtue in Pliny's writings, and virtue in St. Paul's, mean not the same thing. For humility, the basis of a Christian's virtue, the pagan has not even a name in his language. The glory of God is the end of virtue in the system of one,—his own glory is the end of virtue in the system of the other. The Christians of Bithynia would be able to give the severe inquisitor "a reason of the hope that was in them with meekness and fear," and then suffering according to the will of God, to commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as to a faithful Creator. These and other precious sentiments in St. Peter's first epistle, which was addressed to some of their fathers, possibly to some of themselves then alive, would now be remembered with peculiar force. A vain-glorious mind like Pliny's, elated with conscious rectitude, would scorn to hear of being saved by the atoning blood of Jesus, would not believe the representation of human nature which the Christians would give him, and would prefer his own reason before the instruction of the Holy Spirit. Had he been, like Cicero, deeply tinged with the academical philosophy of Greece, like him he would have gloried in sceptical ambiguity, or have inclined to the atheistic views, to which most of the old philosophers were devoted. But as he seems to have imitated him, rather in his passion for oratorical glory, than in his philosophical spirit, he rested in the vulgar creed, highly absurd.

as it was, and preferred it to the purest dictates of Christianity. The former thwarted not his pride and his lusts: the latter required the humiliation of the one, and the mortification of the other.

In all ages, men even of amiable morals, if destitute of true holiness, are enemies of the Gospel.—We here see the true reason of this enmity; which is not capable of being abated by argument: for if that had been the case, Pliny might have seen the iniquity of his proceedings. To call a thing madness and depraved superstition, on the face of which he sees much good and no evil, is the height of unreasonableness. But it is practised by many at this day, who call themselves Christians, and yet are really as averse to the Gospel as Pliny was. Now if we were not willing to be deceived by mere names, but would enter into the spirit of things, it would not be difficult to understand, who they are that resemble Pliny, and who they are that resemble the Christians of Bithynia.

In fact, as there are now, so there were then, persons, who worshipped Christ as their God, who loved one another as brethren united in him: men who derived from his influence support under the severest pressures: who were calumniated by others: who were treated as silly people, on account of that humble and self-denying spirit, by which they kept up communion with their Saviour on earth; and who expected to enjoy him in heaven.—It was not the fault of Trajan and Pliny, that such principles were not exterminated from the earth. They hated the men and their religion.

The difference between the persecutors and the sufferers is remarkable with respect to the spirit of politics. The religion of Trajan was governed by this spirit: And his minister thinks it needful to force men to follow the PAGAN religion, whether they believed it to be right or not. Persecuting edicts appear to have been in force against Christians before the correspondence which we have seen; and Nerva's

toleration seems to have ceased. But the Christians showed, that their Master's kingdom was not of this world: They were meek and passive, as Christ himself had been, and as Peter had exhorted them to be. Their number was very large in Bithynia, capable surely of raising a rebellion troublesome to the state; and they would have done so, if their spirits had been as turbulent as those of many pretended Christians. "But they were subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." If there had been the least suspicion of a seditious spirit among them, Pliny must have mentioned it; and their discontinuance of their feasts of charity, after they found them disagreeable to government, is a proof of their loyal and peaceable temper.

In Asia, Arrius Antoninus persecuted them with extreme fury. I am not certain whether his persecution belongs to the reign of Trajan; but as there was an Antoninus very intimate with Pliny, the following story of him, from Tertullian *, may not improperly be introduced here.—The whole body of Christians, wearied with constant hardships, presented themselves before his tribunal: He ordered a few of them to execution, and said to the rest, "Miserable people, if you choose death, you may find precipices and halters enow."—I am willing to believe, that the Christians hoped to disarm the persecutor by the sight of their numbers.

One of the most venerable characters at this time was Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, the successor of St. James. Jerusalem indeed was no more, but the Church still existed in some part of Judea. Some heretics accused him, as a Christian, before Atticus the Roman governor. He was then a hundred and twenty years old, and was scourged many days. The persecutor was astonished at his hardiness; but not moved with pity for his sufferings:—at last he ordered him to be crucified †.

* Ad. Scapul. C. ult.

† Euseb. B. III.

CHAP.

L

A. D.

107.

Martyrdom
of Ignatius.

It was in the year 107, that Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was martyred for the faith of Jesus. On the death of Euodius, about the year 70, he had been appointed in his room by the Apostles who were then alive. He governed the Church during this long period: Nor was it a small indication of the continued grace of God to that city, to have been blessed so long with such a luminary. We must be content with the short character given of his ministry in the Acts of Ignatius, a piece of martyr-ology first published in 1647 by Archbishop Usher, from two old manuscripts which have stronger marks of credibility than is usual in such compositions.

“ He was a man in all things like to the Apostles. As a good governor, by the helm of prayer and fasting, by the constancy of his doctrine and spiritual labour, he opposed himself to the floods of the adversary: he was like a divine lamp illuminating the hearts of the faithful by his exposition of the Holy Scriptures: and lastly, to preserve his Church, he scrupled not freely to expose himself to a bitter death. These Acts were compiled by those who went with him from Antioch, and were eye-witnesses of his sufferings*.

Ambition and the lust of power were not stronger features in the character of Cæsar, than the desire of martyrdom was in that of Ignatius. Divine Providence however preserved him for the benefit of the Church during the persecution of Domitian, and reserved him to the time of Trajan. This prince being come to Antioch about the tenth year of his reign, in the year 107, in his way to the Parthian war, Ignatius, fearing for the Christians, and hoping to avert the storm by offering himself to suffer in their stead, came voluntarily into the presence of Trajan. I shall deliver the conference, as it stands in the Acts of Ignatius,—a monument of false glory shrouding itself under superstition and ignorance, on the one

* Wake's Epistles.

hand; and of true glory, supported by the faith and hope of Jesus, on the other.

Being introduced into the emperor's presence, he was thus addressed by Trajan*. What an impious spirit art thou, both to transgress our commands, and to inveigle others into the same folly, to their ruin? Ignatius answered, Theophorus ought not to be called so; forasmuch as all wicked spirits are departed far from the servants of God. But if you call me impious because I am hostile to evil spirits, I own the charge in that respect. For I dissolve all their snares, through the inward support of Christ the heavenly King.—Traj. Pray, who is Theophorus?—Ign. He who has Christ in his breast.—Traj. And thinkest thou not that gods reside in us also, who fight for us against our enemies?—Ign. You mistake in calling the demons of the nations by the name of gods. For there is only ONE God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; and ONE Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, whose kingdom be my portion!—Traj. His kingdom do you say, who was crucified under Pilate?—Ign. His, who crucified my sin with its author; and has put all the fraud and malice of Satan under the feet of those who carry him in their heart.—Traj. Dost thou then carry him who was crucified within thee?—Ign. I do; for it is written; "I dwell in them, and walk in them." Then Trajan pronounced this sentence against him: "Since Ignatius confesses, that he carries within himself him that was crucified, we command, that he be carried bound by soldiers to Great Rome, there to be thrown to the wild beasts, for the entertainment of the people."

The learned Scaliger was puzzled to conceive what could induce Trajan to order his being sent so long

* See the Acts of Ignatius; and the Preface of the Life of Ignatius prefixed to a Tragedy written by the Rev. Mr. Gambold, which represents the spirit of primitive Christianity. The tragedy, considered as a composition, is unequal; but contains many beautiful passages.

a journey for execution. It might seem more natural for him to have directed that he should suffer in the view of his own flock, in order to deter them from Christianity. But Trajan might think the example much more striking and extensive, by using the method which he took. At any rate, Providence, undoubtedly displayed, in this way, much more abundantly the honours of the cross, as will appear by what follows.—The doctrine of Union with Christ by faith, now so much ridiculed, appears here in its full glory: And if ever we be called to scenes like these, we shall feel the need of it strongly, and be sensible of the impotence of those schemes of mere human invention, which are often substituted in its room. Only Christ within can support the heart in the hour of severe trial: The boasted moral virtue of proud philosophers is radically defective and unsound.

The scene before us is august; and the state of Christendom at that time is much illustrated by it. The seven epistles of this great man, undoubtedly genuine as they are, and accurately distinguished from all corrupt interpolations*, will come in aid to the Acts of his martyrdom: By them he being dead, yet speaketh; and what the Gospel can do for men, who really believe it, and feel the energy of the Spirit of its divine Author, has not often been more illustriously displayed.

From Antioch he was hurried by his guards to Seleucia: Sailing thence, after great fatigue he arrived at Smyrna. While the ship remained in port, he was allowed the pleasure of visting Polycarp, who was bishop of the Christians there. They had been fellow-disciples of St. John; and the holy joy of their interview may be conceived by such persons as know what the love of Christ is, and how it operates in the breasts of those in whom he dwells. Deputies were sent from the various churches of Asia to attend and

* Archbishop Usher has preserved, or rather restored, these Epistles to us.

console him, and to receive some benefit by his spiritual communications. Bishops, presbyters and deacons, conversed with him: a general convocation seems to have taken place.—Four of Ignatius's seven epistles were written from Smyrna, to the Churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome.

The Church of Ephesus appears, from his epistle to them, still to have maintained its character of evangelical purity. Their zeal indeed had decayed, but was revived: and the rage of persecution was the hot-bed, which reanimated their souls, and made them fruitful again in faith, hope, and charity. The very titles, by which he addresses them, demonstrate what their faith was in common with that of the whole Church at that time; and abundantly show the vanity of those, whose dislike of the peculiar truths of Christianity induces them to suppose, that the ideas of predestination, election, and grace, were purely the systematic inventions of Augustine, and unknown to the primitive Christians.—We are certain, that St. Paul's epistles, and that particularly addressed to this Church, are full of the same things.

“Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the worthily happy Church in Ephesus of Asia, blessed in the majesty and fulness of God the Father, predestinated before the world to be perpetually permanent in glory, immovable, united, and elect in the genuine suffering for the truth*, by the will of the Father, and of Jesus Christ our God, much joy in Jesus Christ, and in his spotless grace.” The character, which he gives of their bishop Onesimus, raises our idea of him to a great degree. He calls him “inexpressible in charity, whom I beseech you to love according to Jesus Christ, and all of you to imitate him. Blessed be his name, who has counted you worthy to enjoy such a bishop.” With him he honourably mentions also some presbyters or deacons of their Church, “Through whom,”

* Alluding, doubtless, to the Errors of the B

“ I have seen you all in love.” Onesimus probably was the fugitive slave of Philemon, a growing place in St. Paul’s time.

The unaffected charity and humility of Ignatius deserve our attention. He alone seemed unconscious of his attainments, while the whole Christian world admired him. “ I do not,” says he, “ dictate to you, as if I were a person of any consequence. For though I am bound for the name of Christ, I am not yet perfected in Christ Jesus. For now I begin to be a disciple, and speak to you as my teachers. For I ought to be sustained by you in faith, in admonition, in patience, in long suffering. But since charity will not suffer me to be silent concerning you, for this reason I take upon me to exhort you to run together with me according to the mind of God.”

Nothing lies more on his heart in all his epistles than to recommend the most perfect union of the members of the Church, and to reprobate schism and dissensions. He represents the Christians as all united to Jesus Christ; all partaking of the same spiritual life. To separate from the Church; and to lose that subordination in which they stood to their pastors, was to tear in pieces the body of Christ and to expose themselves to the seductions of those who would draw them from the faith and hope of the Gospel. In modern times this language is judged not very consonant to the spirit of liberty, of which we are so apt to felicitate ourselves. And I am persuaded, that the strong manner, in which submission to the Bishop is inculcated, has been the most weighty argument with several persons to encourage themselves in doubts of the authenticity of these pieces. But to doubt the genuineness of these epistles on this account, is to be the slaves of prejudice. Usher, and after him Vossius, have sufficiently distinguished the genuine from the false and the interpolated: and the testimony of antiquity, and the agreement of the epistles, as thus purified, with

the quotations of the antients, render them superior to all exceptions *.

The circumstances in which the Churches were, sufficiently justify the strong expressions of Ignatius. Heretics of various kinds abounded: and their specious artifices were likely to seduce the minds of the weak. What then could be so just a preservative to them, as to stick close to the society of their faithful pastors, the successors of the Apostles? Humility is the guard of real Christian goodness: nothing but the want of it could have tempted them to desire a separation: and in every age the same conduct toward godly pastors is, doubtless, the true wisdom of the Church: the spirit of schism, of ambition, of self-conceit, disguising itself under the specious pretences of liberty and of conscience, has constantly produced the most fatal effects. Ignatius certainly would not have wished the Ephesians to follow unsound and unfaithful pastors: but much more caution in judging, and a much greater degree of submission to ministers confessedly upright, are doubtless requisite, than many persons in our days are willing to admit.—“Let no one,” says Ignatius, “mistake;—if any man is not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. If the prayer of one or two has so much strength, how much more that of the Bishop and of the whole Church: He, who separates from it, is proud, and condemns himself: For it is written, God resisteth the proud. Let us study therefore obedience to the Bishop, that we may be subject to God. And the more silent and gentle any one observes the Bishop to be, the more on that account should he reverence him. Every one, to whom the Master commits the stewardship, ought to be received as the Master himself.”—“Indeed,” says he, “Onesimus

* I shall not enter into so large a field of criticism:—whoever has leisure and temper sufficient for the subject, may read with advantage Du Pin's statement of the controversy concerning Ignatius's epistles; and may thence, I believe, find it is needful to be known concerning it.

is for half a century or upwards,—the truth as it is in Jesus was preserved in its purity in these Churches: The opposers of the Gospel could gain no footing at all in some of them: In others they made no great, or at least, no abiding impressions: In some the fervour of piety was much declined; and in others it still retained a considerable strength. A strong sense of the infinite value of Jesus in his Godhead, his priesthood, and his blood, prevailed in this region: Faith and love were fed by the view of the Saviour; and patience in suffering for his name was one of their most common virtues.

Damas, the Bishop of Magnesia, was a young person, whom Ignatius calls “worthy of God.” Eminent grace in persons of tender years was sometimes in the primitive Church distinguished by their advancement to the Episcopacy. In his letter to the Magnesians, he warns them not to despise his youth, but to imitate the holy Presbyters, who gave place to him, but not to him so properly, as to the Father of Jesus Christ.—“Some persons, indeed, call a man a Bishop, but do every thing independently of him. Such seem to me to have lost a good conscience, because their assemblies are not regulated with steadfastness and Christian order.” He mentions also with honour Bassus and Apollonius as Presbyters, and Sotio the deacon, “whose happiness,” says he, “may I partake of! because he is subject to the Bishop, as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery, as to the law of Jesus Christ.”

Here, as elsewhere, he evidently points out three distinct ranks in the primitive Church,—the Bishop, the Presbyters, and the Deacons. A blind and implicit submission to a hierarchy, however corrupt, worthless and ignorant, was then unknown. But a just and regular subordination, according to the ranks of men in the Church, was much attended to; and nothing like it, humanly speaking, so much encourages and enables godly pastors to discharge their

office with zeal and alacrity. Nor is it difficult to conceive, what was the most customary mode of church-government in those times. In vain, I think, will almost any modern church whatever set up a claim to exact resemblance. Usher's model of reduced Episcopacy seems to come the nearest to the plan of the primitive Churches. At first, indeed, or for some time, church governors were only of two ranks, Presbyters and Deacons: At least, this appears to have been the case in particular instances; as at Philippi* and at Ephesus†: and the term Bishop was confounded with that of Presbyter. The Church of Corinth continued long in this state, so far as one may judge by Clement's epistle; and thence we may in part account for the continuance of their contentious spirit. As these Churches grew numerous, they could never be all assembled in one place: the Presbyters must have ministered to different congregations, though the Church continued one. Toward the end of the first century, all the churches followed the model of the mother-church of Jerusalem, where one of the Apostles was the first Bishop. A settled presidency obtained, and the name of Angel was first given to the supreme ruler, though that of Bishop soon succeeded. That this was the case in the seven churches of Asia, is certain. The address of the charges to him in the book of the Revelation demonstrates his superiority. The Deacon, it is well known, was chosen to administer in sacred employments of an inferior kind. These three ranks appear to have been general through the Christian world in the former part of this century.

It has been an error common to all parties, to treat these lesser matters, as if they were JURE DIVINO, or like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unalterable. Could it, however, conveniently be done, it may perhaps be true that a reduced Episcopacy, in which the dioceses are of small extent,

* Ch. i. Philipp.

† Act.

as those in the primitive Church undoubtedly were, and in which the President, residing in the metropolis, exercises a superintendency over ten or twelve Presbyters of the same city and neighbourhood, would bid the fairest to promote order, peace, and harmony.

But the Christian world has been more anxious to support different modes of government, than to behave as Christians ought to do in each of them. A subject of much greater importance is suggested to us by a passage in the epistle to the Magnesians, "As there are two coins, one of God, the other of the world, and each of them is impressed with its own character: the unbelievers are of this world, the believers in love have the character of God the Father through Jesus, into whose sufferings if we are unwilling to die, his life is not in us." Thus does Ignatius call our attention to the grand distinction of men into two sorts before God; of which whoever has felt the force, will be little solicitous concerning other distinctions.

Let us hear Ignatius's testimony to the Deity of Christ, and to justification by his grace through faith, and to the constant influences of the Holy Spirit: And we may observe at the same time, how the Jewish leaven of self-righteousness had not ceased, to attempt at least, to darken, and to corrupt these essentials of the Gospel. The religion of the Jews, indeed, must have been at this time in a very low state; yet the same Pharisaism is so congenial to the human mind, that ministers in all ages will see occasion to warn their people against it, as Ignatius did.

"Be not deceived with heterodox opinions, nor old unprofitable fables. For if we still live according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace. For the Divine Prophets lived according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For this they were persecuted, being inspired by his grace, to assure the

disobedient, that there is one God, who manifested himself by Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Eternal Word—If then they have indeed cast off their old principles, and are come to a new hope in Christ, let them no longer observe the Jewish Sabbath, but live according to the resurrection of the Lord*, in whose resurrection from the dead our resurrection also is ensured, by him and by his death, which some deny;—through whom and by whom we have received the mystery of believing; and on account of this we endure, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher. How can we live without him, whose disciples even the prophets were? for in spirit they expected him as their teacher.—Let us not then be insensible of his loving-kindness: For if he measured to us according to what we have done, we should be ruined. Therefore being his disciples, let us learn to live according to Christianity: he who follows any other name than this, is not of God. Lay aside then the old bitter leaven, and be transformed into a new leaven, which is Jesus Christ—for Christianity is not converted to Judaism, but Judaism to Christianity, that every tongue confessing God might be gathered together.—These things I warn you, my beloved, not because I have known some of you thus ill-disposed; but, as the least of you, I am willing to admonish you, that ye fall not into the snares of vain-glory, but that ye may be well assured of that nativity, suffering, and resurrection, during the government of Pontius Pilate, of which literally and really Jesus Christ was the subject, who is our hope, from which may none of you be turned aside!—I know that ye are not puffed up, for ye have Jesus Christ in yourselves; and the more I praise you, the more I know that ye will be lowly-minded.” —Beautiful view of their genuine humility!—He proceeds thus:—“Study then to be confirmed in the doctrines of the Lord

* *Κυριακὴν ἡμέραν*—A manifest intimation to the Jews to observe the Lord's day.

and of the Apostles, that in all things which ye do, ye may have good success in flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son, and the Father, and the Spirit—Knowing that ye are full of God, I have briefly exhorted you. Remember me in your prayers, that I may come to God, and to the Church in Syria, of which I am unworthy to be called a member. For I need your united prayer in God, and your charity, that the Church in Syria may be thought worthy to partake of the dew of heavenly grace through your Church. The Ephesians at Smyrna, whence I write, together with Polycarp, Bishop of the Smyrneans, and the rest of the Churches in the honour of Jesus Christ, salute you: They live as in the presence of the glory of God, as ye do also, who have refreshed me in all things: Continue strong in the concord of God:—Possess a spirit of union in Jesus Christ.”

From Smyrna he wrote also to the Church of Tralles, the Bishop of which was Polybius, “who so rejoiced with me,” says he, “that I beheld all your multitude in him. Receiving therefore your divine benevolence through him, I seemed actually to find you, as I have known you to be, followers of God. For since ye are subject to the Bishop as to Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live not after man, but after Jesus Christ; who died for us, that believing in his death ye might escape death.”

In what follows we have an intimation of the weak and infant state of this Church; which, though sound, had probably not been so long planted as the rest. And the martyr seems to express some consciousness of superior attainments and gifts, though nevertheless restrained by deep humility.

“I have a strong savour of God; but I take a just measure of myself, lest I perish by boasting. For now I must more abundantly fear, and not attend to those who would inflate me with pride—I love indeed to suffer, but do not know whether I am worthy.—I need gentleness of spirit, by which

the prince of this world is subdued. Cannot I write to you of heavenly things?—Ye are infants; and I fear lest I should hurt you:—I fear lest, through incapacity of receiving stronger meat, ye should be injured in your spiritual growth.”—He goes on to guard them against schisms and heresies, to remind them of the foundation of the Gospel, viz. Christ and him crucified; and, in his usual manner, to recommend obedience to their pastors:—He modestly thus concludes,—“As yet I am not out of the reach of danger; but the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfil my petition and yours, in whom may we be found blameless!”

The subject of his letter to the Roman Christians was, to intreat them not to use any methods for his deliverance.—He had the prize of martyrdom before him, and he was unwilling to be robbed of it.—He speaks with uncommon pathos:

“I fear your charity, lest it should injure me. It will be easy for you to do what you wish: But, it will be difficult for me to glorify God, if I should be spared through your intreaties.—If you be silent in my behalf, I shall be made partaker of God; but if you love to retain me in the flesh, I shall again have my course to run.—I write to the Churches, and signify to them all, that I die willingly for God, unless you prevent me: I beseech you, that you show not an unreasonable love toward me: Suffer me to be the food of beasts, by which means I shall attain to the kingdom of God. Rather encourage the wild beasts, that they may become my sepulchre; that nothing of my body may be left; that I may give no trouble to any one, when I fall asleep.—From Syria to Rome, I fight with wild beasts—in human form,—by land and sea, by night and day, chained to ten leopards, who are made even worse by kind treatment. By their injuries I learn the more to be a disciple of Jesus,—yet am I justified. May I enjoy the real wild beasts.”

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are prepared for me: May they exercise all their fierceness upon me! I will encourage them, that they may assuredly devour me, and not use me as some, whom they have feared to touch. But if they will not do it willingly, I will provoke them to it:—Pardon me,—I know what is good for me. Now I begin to be a disciple: nor shall any thing, of things visible and invisible, move me:—Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the Devil come upon me; be it so, only may I enjoy Jesus Christ! All the ends of the world, and the kingdoms of it will profit me nothing: It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ, than to reign over the ends of the earth: Him I seek who died for us: Him I desire who rose again for us: He is my gain laid up for me:—Suffer me to imitate the Passion of my God. If any of you have him within you, let him conceive what I feel, and let him sympathize with me, and know what a conflict I have. The prince of this world wishes to corrupt my purpose toward God: Let none of you present assist him: My worldly affections are crucified: The fire of God's love burns within me; and cannot be extinguished: It lives: It speaks, and says, 'Come to the Father.' I have no delight in the bread that perisheth, nor in the pleasures of this life: I long for the bread of God; the flesh of Jesus Christ of the seed of David: and I desire to drink his blood,—incorruptible love."

Certainly no words can express in a stronger manner the intenseness of spiritual desire: and one is disposed to look down with contempt and pity on the magnanimity of secular heroes and patriots, as compared with it. Yet I have some doubt, whether all this flame, strong and sincere as it unquestionably was, had not something mixed with it by no means of so pure a kind. For I would not carry the reader's admiration or my own beyond the limits

of human imbecility.—Ought not the Roman Christians to have endeavoured to save Ignatius's life by all honest means?—Has any man a right to hinder others from attempting to save the life of the innocent?—or, Will his entreaties give them a right to be as indifferent for his preservation as he himself is?—Ought not every man, however prepared for death, and preferring it, if God please, to use all possible methods, consistent with a good conscience, to preserve his life?

I cannot answer these queries to the advantage of Ignatius's determination. Was not his desire of martyrdom excessive? If he was wrong, it was doubtless a mistake of judgment. I fear the example of Ignatius did harm in this respect in the Church. Martyrdom was, we know, made too much of in the third century:—so hard is it to be kept from all extremes:—OURS are generally of the opposite kind.

These reflections are suggested, in part by the example of St. Paul. He, indeed, "would go to Jerusalem," though he knew he should be bound. But the certainty of death was not before his eyes, and therefore his resolution, in this case, is not similar to that of Ignatius. As for the rest, he took no pains to dissuade others from saving his life: He took pains to save it himself: He blames his friends at Rome for deserting him: And that eagerness for martyrdom which Ignatius expresses, I see neither in Paul nor in any of the Apostles. They rather refer themselves calmly to the will of God in things which concern themselves. On the whole, there appears in Ignatius, the same zeal for God and love to Jesus Christ, and the same holy contempt of earthly things, which was so eminent in the Apostles; but, I suspect, not an equal degree of calm resignation to the Divine Will.

The time which he was allowed to spend at Smyrna, in company with his beloved Polycarp and other friends, must have been highly agreeable.

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him. But his keepers were impatient of their long stay: the reasons were, most probably, of a maritime nature. The season, however, for the public spectacles at Rome was advancing, and, perhaps, they were afraid of not arriving in time. They now set sail for Troas, where, at his arrival, he was refreshed with the news of the persecution ceasing in the Church of Antioch. He had been attended hither by Burrhus, the deacon of Polycarp; and him he dispatched with an epistle to the Philadelphians, by way of return for the visit which their Bishop had paid him at Troas. For here also several Churches sent their messengers to visit and to salute him: and Providence so far restrained the inhumanity of his guards, that he was allowed to have intercourse with them.—He wrote three epistles more at this place.

The Philadelphians, from his account, were still favoured with the same spirit of grace, by which they had been already so honourably distinguished among the seven churches of Asia. He recommends, as usual, unity, concord, obedience;—not that he had found any thing amiss in them, in these respects.

One may form some idea of the manner in which these primitive Christians enjoyed the grace of God, and admired and loved it, as it appeared in one another, by his way of speaking of the Philadelphian Bishop, whose name is not given to us, “whom,” says he, “I know to have obtained the ministry, not by any selfish or worldly means or motives, but for the common good of saints; nor through vain-glory; but from the love of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am perfectly charmed with his meekness: When silent, he exhibits more power than vain speakers.”

He recommends to them to preserve a unity in the administration of the Lord's Supper: “For there is one body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the unity of his blood; one altar, as also one

Bishop, with the Presbytery and the Deacons my fellow-servants.—Whatever ye do, do all according to the will of God.”

The firmness of Christian faith, and his zeal against the spirit of self-righteousness, are observable in the following passage:—“ If any interpret Judaism to you, hear him not. For it is better to hear the Gospel from a circumcised person, than Judaism from an uncircumcised one. But if both speak not of Jesus Christ, they are to me pillars and sepulchres of the dead, on which are written only the names of men.—The objects dear to me are Jesus Christ, his cross, his death, his resurrection, and the faith which is in him; by which I desire, through your prayer, to be justified.” He begs them to send a Deacon to Antioch, to congratulate his people on the cessation of persecution. Toward the conclusion he speaks of Philo, the Deacon from Cilicia, who ministered to him, together with Agathopes, a choice saint, who, renouncing the world, had followed him from Syria.

He wrote also from Troas to the Smyrneans, and his commendations of them are consonant to the character they bear in the book of the Revelation. They had weathered the storm of persecution, which was there predicted, and had probably enjoyed the ministry of Polycarp from St. John’s time. The most striking thing in this epistle, is the zeal with which he warns them against the Docetæ. In his view the evil of their heresy consisted in taking away the atoning blood of Christ, and the hope of a blessed resurrection:—Let modern Divines hear him, and be instructed. “ I glorify Jesus Christ our God, who hath given you wisdom. For I understand, that ye are perfect in the immovable faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; who REALLY was of the seed of David according to the flesh, and born of a virgin REALLY;—who REALLY suffered under Pontius Pilate. For these things he suffered for us, that we

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wrestler to be mangled,—and yet to conquer:—Be more studious than thou art:—Consider the times; and expect Him who is above all time, who is unconnected with time, the invisible one made visible for us,—the impassible, but passible for us; who bore all sorts of sufferings for us.—Let not widows be neglected: Next to the Lord, do thou take care of them: Let nothing be done without thy cognizance: Do thou nothing without the mind of God.—Let assemblies be more frequently held: Seek out all by name: Despise not slaves of either sex; yet let them not be puffed up, but serve more faithfully to the glory of God, that they may obtain a better liberty from God: Let them not desire to be set at liberty at the charge of the Church, lest they be found slaves of lust.—If any can remain in chastity for the honour of the Lord, let them do so without boasting. If they boast, they are lost: and if the man set himself up above the Bishop, he is lost. It behoves the married to enter into that connection with the consent of the Bishop, that the marriage may be after the will of God, and not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh.”

From Troas, Ignatius, being brought to Neopolis, passed by Philippi through Macedonia, and that part of Epirus, which is next to Epidamnus. Having found a ship in one of the sea-ports, his conductors sailed over the Adriatic; and thence, entering into the Tuscan sea, and passing by several islands and cities, at length they came in view of Puteoli, which being shown to him, he hastened to go forth, desirous to tread in the steps of the Apostle Paul: but a violent wind arising would not permit him to accomplish this design. His attendants, the relaters of the martyrdom, say, that the wind then became favourable for one day and night;—and that they were hurried on contrary to their wishes: THEY sorrowed at the thought of being separated from him: but HE rejoiced in the prospect of soon leaving the

world and departing to his Lord, whom he loved:— They sailed into the Roman port Ostia; and when the impure sports were at an end, the soldiers began to be offended with his slowness; but the Bishop joyfully complied with their hastiness. Ostia was some miles from Rome; and he was met by the Roman Christians, who intimated their strong desire for his preservation. Some of them probably had influence with the great; and they were willing to try it: Ignatius, however, was inflexible. He was brought to Rome, and presented to the prefect of the city.

When he was led to execution, he was attended by a number of the brethren, and was allowed to join in prayer with them. And he prayed to the Son of God* in behalf of the Churches,—that he would put a stop to the persecution, and continue the love of the brethren toward each other. He was then led into the amphitheatre, and speedily thrown to the wild beasts. He had here also his wish: The beasts were his grave: A few bones only were left, which the Deacons gathered, carefully preserved, and afterwards buried at Antioch.

The writers thus conclude: “We have made known to you both the day and the time of his martyrdom,—that being assembled together according to that time, we may jointly commemorate the magnanimous martyr of Christ, who trode under foot the devil, and completed the course which he had devoutly wished in Christ Jesus our Lord, by whom and with whom all glory and power be to the Father with the blessed Spirit for ever. Amen.”

Usher has preserved, or rather restored to us also an epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians. It breathes the same spirit as those of his fellow-disciple, but has less pathos and vigour of sentiment. Citations from it will be needless.—He begs the Philippians to

* I use the expression of the Narrative: let them make the obvious inference for himself.

Martyrdom
of Ignatius:

A. D.
107.

communicate to him what they knew of Ignatius, whom they had seen at Philippi, after his departure from Smyrna. We hence see how the Churches then formed one large fraternity, abstracted from partial views of supporting little factions and interests. He exhorts them to obey the word of righteousness, and to exercise all patience, which they had seen exemplified in Ignatius, and in others among themselves, and in Paul himself, and the rest of the Apostles : for these loved not this present world, but him, who died and was raised again by God for us. By his account it appears, that the Philippians still retained the Christian spirit.—One of the Presbyters, Valens, together with his wife, had sinned through covetousness.—Would to God such spots in the pastoral character were as singular in our times ! Polycarp beautifully expresses his charitable concern for them, and exhorts them, in affectionate sympathy, to endeavour to restore their spiritual health.

These facts and observations throw some light on the persecution of Trajan, on the spirit of Christians so far as it can be collected at that time, on the martyrdom of Ignatius, and on the signal glory which God was pleased to diffuse around it among the Churches.

CHAP II.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE REIGNS OF ADRIAN AND ANTONINUS PIUS.

Death of
Trajan :

117.

TRAJAN died in the year 117. The latter part of his reign had been employed in his great military expedition into the East, whence he lived not to return. His exploits and triumphs fall not within my province :—I have no concern with him except in that line, in which to a Christian he must appear to the greatest disadvantage ; and out of which, it were heartily to be wished, that he had ever given any evidence of a desire to remove. His successor Adrian,

appears not to have issued any persecuting edicts. But the iniquity of his predecessor survived; and Adrian's silent acquiescence for a time, gave it sufficient scope to exert itself in acts of barbarity*.

In the mean time the Gospel spread more and more. A number of apostolical persons demonstrated by their conduct, that the Spirit, which had influenced the Apostles rested upon them. Filled with divine charity, they distributed their substance to the poor, and travelled into regions, which, as yet, had not heard the sound of the Gospel: and having planted the faith, they ordained pastors, committed to them the culture of the new ground, and then passed into other countries. Hence numbers, through grace, embraced the doctrine of salvation, at the first hearing, with much alacrity†. It is natural to admire here the power of the Holy Spirit of God in the production of so pure and charitable a temper; to contrast it with the illiberal selfishness too prevalent even among the best in our days; and to regret how little is done for the propagation of the Gospel through the world, by nations whose aids of commerce and navigation are so much superior to those enjoyed by the ancients.—One advantage those Christians possessed indeed, which we have not: They were all one body, one Church, of one name, and cordially loved one another as brethren: The attention to fundamentals, to real Christianity, was not dissipated by schismatic peculiarities, nor was the body of Christ rent in pieces by factions: There were indeed many heretics; but real Christians admitted them not into their communities: the line of distinction was drawn with sufficient precision; and a dislike of the person or offices of Christ, and of the real spirit of holiness, discriminated the heretics: and separation from them, while it was undoubtedly

* The persecution of the 2d year of Adrian, is commonly called the Fourth Persecution of the Christians.

† Euseb. B. iii. c. 33.

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II.Character
of Quadratus.

the best mark of charity to their souls, tended to preserve their faith and love of true Christians : genuine purity.

Among these holy men Quadratus was much distinguished. He succeeded Publius in the bishopric of Athens, who had suffered martyrdom either this or in the foregoing reign. He found the flock in a dispersed and confused state* : Their public assemblies were deserted : their zeal was grown cold and languid : their lives and manners were corrupted and they seemed likely to apostatize from Christianity. Quadratus laboured to recover them with much zeal and with equal success†. Order and discipline were restored, and with them the holy flame of godliness. One of the strongest testimonies of these things, is the account which the famous Origen, in the second book of his treatise against Celsus, gives of the Athenian Church. While that great man is demonstrating the admirable efficacy of Christian faith on the minds of men, he exemplifies his positions by this very Church of Athens, on account of its good order, constancy, meekness, and quietness :—He represents it as infinitely superior, in these respects, to the common political assembly of that city, which was factious and tumultuary. He affirms that it was evident, that the worst parts of the Church were better than the best of their popular assemblies. This is a very pleasing testimony to the growth of Christianity, since the time that a handful of seed was sown there by St. Paul : and let the testimony of so penetrating and sagacious an observer as Origen be considered, as one of the main proofs that might be given of the happy effect which real Christianity has on human society. To a mind not intoxicated with vain ideas of secular glory, the Christian part of Athens must appear infinitely more happy and more respectable, than that commonwealth ever had been in the meridian of its glory.

* Euseb. B. iv. c. 22.

† Cave's Life of Quadratus.

—But we hope in future pages to give much stronger proofs of the advantages derived to society from the Gospel.

In the sixth year of his reign, Adrian came to Athens, and was initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries. This prince was remarkably fond of Pagan institutions; and by this very circumstance demonstrated a spirit extremely foreign to Christianity. The persecutors were proceeding with sanguinary vigour, when Quadratus, at length, presented an apology to the emperor, in which he defended the Gospel from the calumnies of its enemies; and in which he particularly took notice of our Saviour's miracles, his curing of diseases, and raising of the dead,—some instances of which, he says, namely, of persons raised from the dead, were alive in his time.

Aristides, a Christian writer at that time in Athens, addressed himself also to Adrian in an apology on the same subject. The good sense of the emperor at length was roused to do justice to his innocent subjects. The apologies of the two writers may be reasonably supposed to have had some effect on his mind. Yet a letter from Serenius Granianus, pro-consul of Asia, may be conceived to have moved him still more. He wrote to the emperor, “that it seemed to him unreasonable, that the Christians should be put to death, merely to gratify the clamours of the people, without trial, and without any crime proved against them.” This seems the first instance of any Roman governor daring publicly to suggest ideas contradictory to Trajan's iniquitous maxims, which inflicted death on Christians **AS SUCH**, abstracted from any moral guilt. And it seems to me a sufficient proof, that the severe sufferings of Christians at this period, which appear to have been very remarkable in Asia, were more owing to the active and sanguinary spirit of persecution itself,—which, from Trajan's example, **was become** very fashionable,—than to any explicit **regal** edicts.

We have Adrian's rescript addressed to Minucius Fundanus, the successor of Granianus, whose government seems to have been near to its conclusion, when he wrote to the emperor.

To Minucius Fundanus.

“ I have received a letter written to me by the very illustrious Serenius Granianus, whom you have succeeded.—To me then the affair seems by no means fit to be slightly passed over, that men may not be disturbed without cause, and that sycophants may not be encouraged in their odious practices. If the people of the province will appear publicly, and make open charges against the Christians, so as to give them an opportunity of answering for themselves, let them proceed in that manner only, and not by rude demands and mere clamours. For it is much more proper, if any person will accuse them, that you should take cognizance of these matters. If any then accuse, and show that they actually break the laws, do you determine according to the nature of the crime. But, by Hercules*, if the charge be a mere calumny, do you estimate the enormity of such calumny, and punish it as it deserves.”

Notwithstanding the obscurity, which I find Dr. Jortin and Dr. Lardner suppose to be in this rescript, I cannot but think it clearly shows that it was the intention of the emperor to prevent Christians from being punished as such. The only reason for hesitation, which I can see, is the inconsistency of it with Trajan's rescript. But it does not appear that Adrian intended the conduct of his predecessor to be the model of his own: and we shall see, in the next reign, still clearer proofs of the equity of Adrian's views. It is but justice due to this emperor, to free his character from the charge of persecution; and

* This is an oath, demonstrating only the earnestness of the writer in his declarations, according to the usual profaneness of men.

Christians of that or of any age could not object to the propriety of being punished equally with other men, if they violated the laws of the state. But it is the glory of the times we are now reviewing, that no men were more innocent, peaceable, and well-disposed citizens than the Christians. Yet the enmity of men's minds against real godliness,—so natural in all ages,—laid them under extreme disadvantages unknown to others, in vindicating themselves from unjust aspersions: and this forms, indeed, one of the most painful crosses which good men must endure in this life. For example, many heretics, who wore the name of Christians, were guilty of the most detestable enormities: these were indiscriminately charged by the Pagans on Christians in general.—This circumstance, in addition to other still more important reasons, rendered them careful in preserving the line of separation distinct: and, by the excellency of their doctrine, and the purity of their lives, they were enabled gradually to overcome all uncandid insinuations.

There is extant also a letter of Adrian*, in which he speaks of Christian bishops in as respectable a manner as of the priests of Serapis; and of Christians in general as very numerous at Alexandria. Since St. Mark's time therefore, it is evident, though we have scarcely any particular accounts, that the Gospel must have flourished abundantly in Egypt.

But the same equitable rule of government, which forbade Adrian to punish the innocent Christians, led him to be very severe against the guilty Jews: for now appeared Barchochebas, who pretended to be the star prophesied of by Balaam. This miserable people, who had rejected the true Christ, received the impostor with open arms; and were by him led into horrid crimes; and amongst the rest into a cruel treatment of the Christians†. The issue

* Vopiscus, b. ii. 67.

† Justin Martyr, in his first, commonly called second Apology, observes

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II.Adrian
comes to
Jerusalem:A. D.
117.

of the rebellion was the entire exclusion of the Jews from the city and territory of Jerusalem. Another city was erected in its stead, and called, after the emperor's name, *Ælia*. This leads us to consider how the state of the mother-church of Jerusalem was affected by this great revolution. The Christians, previous to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, as it has been observed, had retired to Pella, a little town beyond Jordan, inhabited by Gentiles. The unexpected retreat of Cestius had given them this opportunity of effecting their escape. How long they continued here, is uncertain. They may, however, have returned before Adrian's time, and on coming to Jerusalem 47 years after the devastation, found there a few houses and a little Church. Christians built on mount Sion. Here the Church of Jerusalem kept their solemn assemblies, and seemed to have acquired a splendid accession by the conversion of Aquila, the emperor's kinsman, whom he made governor and overseer of the new city. But as he continued to pursue his magic and astrological studies, he was excluded from the Church.—A strong proof that the mother-church still retained a measure of its pristine purity and discipline!—Corrupt churches are glad to retain persons of eminence in their communion, however void of the spirit of the Gospel.—Aquila, incensed, apostatized to Judaism, and translated the old Testament into Greek*.

Eusebius, b. iv. c. 5. gives us a list of the bishops who successively presided in Jerusalem. The first was the Apostle James, the second Simeon; and whose histories have been recorded. He mentions thirteen more: but we have no account of their characters or actions. During all this time something judaical seems to have continued in their practice. Eusebius observes that Barchochebas cruelly tortured such Christians who refused to deny and blaspheme Jesus Christ.

* Cave's Life of Simeon.

though Jewish ideas would naturally decay by degrees. The revolution under Adrian, at length put a total end to the Jewish Church, by the extirpation and banishment of this people.—To such outward changes is the Church of Christ subject: a new Church, however, arose in Ælia, of the Gentiles, whose bishop was named Mark.

Adrian after a reign of twenty-one years, was succeeded by Antoninus Pius, who appears to have been, at least in his own personal character and intentions, always guiltless of Christian blood. It was now very difficult for the enemies of Christ to support their persecuting spirit, with any tolerably specious pretensions: The abominations of heretics, whom ignorance and malice will ever confound with real Christians, furnished them with some: Probably these were much exaggerated: but, whatever they were, the whole Christian name was accused of them. They were charged with incest, and the devouring of infants; and thus a handle was afforded for the barbarous treatment of the best of mankind; till time detected the slanders, and men became at length ashamed of affecting to believe what was in its own nature improbable, and was supported by no evidence. It pleased God at this time to endow some Christians with the power of defending his truth by the manly arms of rational argumentation. Justin Martyr presented his first Apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius, about the third year of his reign, A. D. 140. He was of that class of men, who, in those days, were usually called philosophers. His conversion to Christianity, his views and spirit, his labours and sufferings, will deserve to be considered in a distinct chapter. Suffice it here to say, that the information and arguments, which his first Apology contained, were not in vain. Antoninus was a man of sense and humanity. Open to conviction, uncorrupted by the vain and chimerical philosophy of the times, he was desirous of doing justice to

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Apology,
A. D.
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or
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mankind. Asia propria was still the scene of vital Christianity and of cruel persecution.—Thence the Christians applied to Antoninus ; and complained of the many injuries which they sustained from the people of the country.—Earthquakes, it seems, had lately happened ; and the Pagans were much terrified, and ascribed them to the vengeance of Heaven against the Christians. We have, both in Eusebius* and at the end of Justin's first Apology, the edict sent to the common council of Asia ; every line of which deserves attention.

The Emperor, to the Common Council of Asia.

“ I am quite of opinion, that the gods will take care to discover such persons. For it much more concerns them to punish those who refuse to worship them, than you, if they be able. But you harass and vex the Christians, and accuse them of Atheism and other crimes, which you can by no means prove. To them it appears an advantage to die for their religion, and they gain their point, while they throw away their lives, rather than comply with your injunctions. As to the earthquakes which have happened in past times, or lately, is it not proper to remind you of your own despondency, when they happen ;—and to desire you to compare your spirit with theirs, and observe how serenely they confide in God ? In such seasons you seem to be ignorant of the gods, and to neglect their worship : You live in the practical ignorance of the supreme God himself, and you harass and persecute to death those who do worship him. Concerning these same men, some others of the provincial governors wrote to our divine father Adrian, to whom he returned answer, —‘ That they should not be molested, unless they appeared to attempt something against the Roman government.’ Many also have signified to me

* B. iv. 11, 12, 13.

concerning these men, to whom I have returned an answer agreeable to the maxims of my father. But if any person will still persist in accusing the Christians merely as such,—Let the accused be acquitted, though he appear to be a Christian;—and let the accuser be punished.”—Set up at Ephesus in the common assembly of Asia.

Eusebius informs us, that this was no empty edict, but was really put in execution. Nor did this emperor content himself with one edict. He wrote to the same purport to the Larisseans, the Thessalonians, the Athenians, and all the Greeks.

As this prince reigned 23 years, such vigorous measures must, after some time at least, have had their effect. And we may fairly conclude that during a great part of this reign the Christians were permitted to worship God in peace. A few remarks on the conduct of this prince, and on the facts which appear on the face of his edict, may be judged not improper.

1. There are, it seems, some instances of princes, even in ancient history, not unacquainted with the just principles of religious liberty, which are now more generally understood. The most intelligent legislator, in any age, never understood the natural rights of conscience better than Antoninus Pius. He saw that Christians, AS SUCH, ought not to be punished. His subjects, bigoted and barbarous, were far from thinking so; and it was not till after repeated edicts and menaces, that he forced them to cease from persecution.

2. In the conduct of this emperor one may observe how far human nature can advance in moral virtue by its natural resources, while it remains destitute of the grace of God and the superior principle of holiness. If the advocates of natural morality, considered as abstracted from Christianity, were to fix on a character the most able to support the right of their cause, it would be their interest

into the hands of Antoninus Pius. He would defend it, not with pompous systems and declamatory flourishes, but by an amiable, generous, and magnanimous conduct. I have been astonished at the character that is recorded of him. Doubtless a more distinct and explicit detail of his life would lessen our admiration. We have not the opportunity of knowing him so thoroughly as we do Socrates and Cicero. The former, by the writings of his scholars, the latter by his own, are known as minutely as if they were our contemporaries. Could the emperor be as accurately scrutinized, possibly something of the supercilious pride of the Grecian, or of the ridiculous vain-glory of the Roman patriot, might appear. They are both allowed to be very eminent patterns of moral virtue; but yet, with all the disadvantages of such imperfect historians as Victor and Julius Capitolinus, they must concede the palm to Antoninus. Despotic power, in his hands, seems to have been only an instrument of doing good to mankind. His temper was mild and gentle in a very high degree; yet the vigour of his government was as striking, as if he had been of the most keen and irritable disposition. He consulted the welfare of his subjects with great diligence: He attended to all persons and things with as minute an exactness, as if his own private property had been concerned *.—Scarcely any fault is ascribed to him, but that of a temper excessively inquisitive. His successor, the second Antoninus, owns, that he was religious without superstition; and in particular, that he was not superstitious in the worship of the gods. This we have in his Stoical Meditations, still extant†. We cannot therefore doubt but that a person of this stamp would find opportunities of knowing what Christianity was. He certainly did know something of it, and he approved of the

* Juli. Capitol. Vit. Ant. chap. vii. See Lardner's Collections, chap. xiv.

† Book vi. c. 30.

moral conduct of Christians. He gives them the most honourable character, has no fear of them as disloyal or turbulent, and makes comparisons between them and Pagans to the advantage of the former. From an expression in the edict,—“if they be able,”—one might be tempted to suspect, that he had very little INTERNAL respect for the gods. Were there no God, no divine providence, and no future state, the virtue of this man would doubtless be as complete, and as consistent as so absurd an hypothesis will permit:—but his case shows, that it is possible, by the united influence of good sense and good temper, for a man to be extremely beneficent to his fellow-creatures without due regard to his Maker. Surely—if the holiness of a truly-converted Christian, and the mere moral virtue of a “natural man,” were the same things,—Antoninus ought to be esteemed a Christian.—Yet it does not appear that he ever seriously studied the Gospel.—A sceptical carelessness and indifference, not unlike that temper, which, under the names of candour and moderation, has now overspread the face of Europe, appears to have possessed the mind of this amiable prince: and, while he attended to the temporal advantages of mankind, and felicitated himself on his good actions, he seemed to forget that he had a soul accountable to the Supreme Being; and scarcely to think it possible, that it should have any guilt to answer for before HIM. The evil of such a contempt of God is what mankind are of all things least inclined to discern: Yet it is the evil of all others the most vehemently reprobated in Scripture under the several branches of idolatry, unbelief, self-righteousness, and pride. No wonder;—for, without a knowledge of this evil, and a humble sense of guilt in consequence, the very nature of the Gospel itself cannot be understood. The conclusion resulting from this consideration is, that godliness is perfectly distinct from mere morality: The latter indeed,

flourishes where godliness is ; but it is capable of a separate existence.

3. The edict of this good emperor is a singularly valuable testimony in favour of the Christians of that time. It appears that there were then a race of men devoted to the service of Christ, ready to die for his name and for his religion. These men exemplified the superior worth of their religion by a superior probity and innocence of manners, so as to appear the best of subjects in the opinion of an emperor of the highest candour, intelligence, and acute observation. They were not inferior to the most excellent of the heathens in morality : and they possessed, further,—what this emperor confesses their enemies were void of,—a sincere spirit of reverence for the Supreme Being,—an unaffected contempt of death,—and that to which Stoicism pretends,—a real serenity of mind under the most pressing dangers;—and all this grounded on an unshaken confidence in God.—We cannot but hence conclude—that the effusion of the Spirit of God, which began at the feast of Pentecost, was still continued. By the testimony of an heathen prince, Christians were so IN POWER, and NOT IN NAME ONLY : and those, who would substitute the virtue of the morality of fallen man in the place of the religion of Christians, would do well to consider, that sound virtue and sound morality themselves know no support like that of Christianity.—This divine religion comprehends every possible excellence that can be found in all others ; and has, over and above, its OWN PECULIAR virtues :—It possesses a fund of consolation, and an energy of support under the prospect of death itself ; and it points out the only safe and sure road to a blissful immortality.

CHAP. III.

JUSTIN MARTYR.

THIS great man was born at Neapolis in Samaria, anciently called Sichem. His father was a Gentile, —probably one of the Greeks, belonging to the colony transplanted thither: He gave his son a philosophical education.—Justin in his youth travelled for the improvement of his understanding; and Alexandria afforded him all the entertainment which an inquisitive mind could derive from the fashionable studies. The Stoics appeared to him at first the masters of happiness. He gave himself up to one of this sect, till he found he could learn from him nothing of the nature of God. It is remarkable—as he tells us himself*,—that his tutor informed him,—this was a knowledge by no means necessary; which fact very much illustrates the views of Dr. Warburton, concerning these ancient philosophers: namely, that they were Atheists in reality. He next betook himself to a Peripatetic, whose anxious desire of settling the price of his instructions convinced Justin that truth did not dwell with HIM. A Pythagorean next engaged his attention, who, requiring of him the previous knowledge of music, astronomy, and geometry, dismissed him for the present, when he understood that he was unfurnished with those sciences. In much solicitude he applied himself to a Platonic philosopher; and with a more plausible appearance of success from this teacher than from any of the foregoing. He now gave himself to retirement. “As I was walking,” says Justin, “near the sea, I was met by an aged person of a venerable appearance, whom I beheld with much attention. We soon entered into conversation; and upon my

* His dialogue with Trypho, whence the account of his conversion is extracted.

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III.

professing a love for private meditation; the venerable old man hinted at the absurdity of mere speculation, abstracted from practice: 'This,' continues Justin, "gave occasion to me to express my ardent desire of knowing God, and to expatiate on the praises of philosophy. The stranger by degrees endeavoured to cure me of my unmeaning admiration of Plato and Pythagoras: He pointed out the writings of the Hebrew prophets as much more ancient than any of those called philosophers; and he led me to some view of the nature and of the evidences of Christianity: He added, 'above all things, pray, that the gates of light may be opened to you: for they are not discernible, nor to be understood by any one, except God and his Christ enable a man to understand.' He said many other things to the same effect: He then directed me to follow his advice; and he left me. I saw him no more; but—immediately a fire was kindled in my soul, and I had a strong affection for the prophets and for those men who are the friends of Christ; I weighed within myself the arguments of the aged stranger; and, in the end, I found the divine Scriptures to be the only sure philosophy."—We have no more particulars of the exercises of his mind in religion.—His conversion took place, from this beginning, sometime in the reign of Adrian. But he has shown us enough to make it evident, that CONVERSION was then looked upon as an inward spiritual work in the soul,—the same work of grace which the Spirit operates at this day on real Christians. There appear, in his case, an earnest thoughtfulness attended with a strong desire to know God, and also an experimental sense of his own ignorance and of the insufficiency of human resources. Then there appear further,—the providential care of God in bringing him under the means of Christian instruction,—a direction to his soul to pray for spiritual illumination,—the divine hunger created in his heart,—and, in due time, the

satisfactory comforts and privileges of real Christianity; which with him was not mere words and declarations; for he says, He found Christianity to have a formidable majesty in its nature, adapted to terrify those who are in the way of transgression, as well as a sweetness, peace, and serenity for those who are conversant in it. He owns in another of his works *, that the example of Christians suffering death so serenely for their faith, moved his mind not a little: This is an obvious consideration, and needs not be insisted on, however worthy it may be the notice of those called philosophers in any age. —Justin after his conversion still wore the usual philosophic garb, which demonstrates that he retained, perhaps, too great an affection for the studies of his youth †: and if I mistake not, he always preserved a very strong tincture of the spirit of philosophy, though not in such a manner as to prevent his sincere attachment to the Gospel.

Coming to Rome in the time of Antoninus Pius, he there wrote a confutation of the heretics: particularly of Marcion, the son of a bishop born in Pontus; who, for lewdness ‡, was ejected from the Church and had fled to Rome, where he broached errors of an Antinomian tendency. It makes no part of my plan to define the systems of heretics; but only to speak of them as they come in my way, with a special reference to the opposition, which they made to the fundamentals of the Gospel. That holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord,” and which it was the great design of Christ to promote, found in this pretended Christian a bitter enemy. Justin, who had tasted of the holy nature of the Gospel in his own experience, withstood him both in conversation and by his writings.

* Apology second, though misnamed the first, in all the copies of Justin.

† Cave's life of Justin.

‡ The truth of this charge against his morals has been disputed, and possibly with justice.

Justin's
Apology:

A. D.

140.

About the year 140, he published his excellent Apology for the Christians, addressed to Antoninus Pius, which may reasonably be supposed to have had a considerable influence on that emperor's political conduct towards the Christians.

It appears from this performance, that it was common to accuse Christians merely *as such*; and to charge the faults of any persons, who bore the name of the whole body.—Thus there is no new thing under the sun.—The term Christian was matter of obloquy at that time: Various other terms of scoff and contempt have been invented since; and it requires no great degree of rational power to show, as Justin has done completely, the absurdity and inconclusiveness of such methods of attacking religion, whether they be ancient or modern. He takes notice also of the happy effects which the conduct of Christians had then on mankind. “We have many instances,” says he, “to show the powerful effects of example among men: Many persons have been impressed in favour of the Gospel by observing the sobriety and temperance of their neighbours,—or the unparalleled meekness of their fellow-travellers under cruel treatment; or the uncommon integrity and equity of those with whom they transacted business.” These are fresh proofs of the continuance of vital religion in the time of Justin:—A man calling himself a Christian, without any practical power of the religion, would scarcely have then been classed among the brethren. I find also fresh proofs, in this apology, of the strong line of distinction kept up in those days between Christians and heretics. The author observes that the latter were fond of the name of Christians, and yet were not persecuted.—There was nothing in their spirit and conduct that provoked persecution.—He takes notice also of the small number of Jewish converts in comparison of the main body of the nation. But this, he observes, was agreeable to the prophecies of the Old

Testament. He describes likewise the customs of the primitive Christians in public worship, and in the administration of the sacraments, in order to show the falsehood of the charges generally urged against them.

Not long after his first Apology, Justin left Rome and went to Ephesus, where he had a discourse with Trypho the Jew;—the substance of which he has given us in a dialogue. In this work he notices the common calumnies against Christians,—of their eating men,—of their extinguishing the lights,—and of their promiscuous sensuality; but treats these charges as not credited by men of sense and candour among their enemies; and therefore as not meriting a serious confutation.

On his return to Rome, he had frequent contests with Crescens the philosopher,—a man equally remarkable for malignity to Christians, and for the most horrid vices. Justin now presented his second Apology to M. Antoninus Philosophus, the successor of Pius, and a determined enemy to Christians. He had conceived hopes of softening his mind toward them, as he had done that of his predecessor,—but in vain. Marcus was their enemy during his whole reign; and they scarcely ever had an enemy more implacable.—The immediate occasion of the second Apology, as he himself informs the Emperor, was this :—

“ A certain woman at Rome had, together with her husband, lived in extreme profligacy and licentiousness. But on her conversion to Christianity, her own conduct being changed, she endeavoured to persuade her husband also to imitate her example, by representing to him the punishment of eternal fire, which in a future state would be inflicted on the disobedient. But he persisting in his wickedness, she was induced to wish for a separation. By the advice of her friends, she continued, however, to live with him, hoping that in process

time he might be brought to repentance. Upon his coming to Alexandria, he proceeded to greater lengths of wickedness, so that finding the connexion now no longer tolerable, she procured a divorce from him. He, not impressed with the happy change which had taken place in her dispositions, and unmoved with her compassionate attempts to rescue him from ruin, accused her of being a Christian. Upon which she presented a petition to you, O EMPEROR, that she might have time to dispose and regulate her household affairs : and she promised that after that was done, she would answer to the charge ; —which petition you granted. The husband, finding his wife to have gained a respite from his malice, diverted it to another object,—to one Ptolemy, who had instructed her in Christianity, and who had been punished by Urbicius the prefect of Rome. He persuaded a centurion, his friend, to imprison Ptolemy ; and to ask him whether he was a Christian. He, no flatterer or dissembler, ingenuously confessed, and was a long time punished with imprisonment. At last, when he was brought before Urbicius, and was asked only this question—whether he was a Christian, he confessed himself a teacher of the Divine Truth. For no true Christian can act otherwise. —Urbicius, nevertheless, ordered him to be led to execution : Upon this, a Christian, named Lucius, expostulated with him on the absurdity of these proceedings,—on the iniquity of putting men to death merely for a name, abstracted from any one specific charge of guilt ;—a conduct unworthy of emperors such as Pius the last, or Philosophus the present *, or of the sacred Senate. ‘ You too appear to me to be of the same sect,’ was all that the prefect deigned to reply. Lucius confessed that he was ; and was himself led also to execution ; which he

* I am aware that the Greek in Justin would make it probable that Pius was then reigning ; but Eusebius’s contrary testimony determines me to think otherwise.

bore with triumphant serenity; declaring that he was now going from unrighteous governors to God his gracious Father and King. A third person was sentenced also to death on the same occasion. "And I also," continues Justin, "expect by persons of this sort to be murdered, perhaps by Crescens the pretended philosopher. For he deserves not the name of a philosopher, who, with a view of pleasing many deceived persons, publicly accuses Christians of Atheism and impiety, though he himself be totally ignorant of their real character. I, Justin, have interrogated him, and proved that he is quite unacquainted with the subject. I am willing to undergo an examination before you in company with him. And my questions and his answers will make it evident to yourself, that he knows nothing of our affairs; or, at least, conceals what he does know."

But Marcus was not a man disposed to exercise common justice towards Christians. The philosophic garb was no shield to Justin, even in the eyes of an emperor, who piqued himself on the surname of philosopher. The sincerity of his Christian attachments outweighed every argument and every plausible appearance in his favour. Crescens procured him imprisonment for the crime of being a Christian,—the greatest evil of which a human being could be guilty in the eyes of this emperor. The acts of his martyrdom, which carry more marks of truth than many other martyrologies, give the following account*: "He and six of his companions having been apprehended, were brought before Rusticus the prefect,—who, I suppose, had succeeded Urbicius,—a person of considerable eminence, and famous for his attachment to Stoicism. He had been tutor to the emperor, who acknowledges, in the first book of his *Meditations*, his obligations to him on several accounts, and particularly for his teaching him to be of a placable and forgiving temper. This is one

* Cave's *Life of Justin*.

instance, among thousands, that it is possible for a man to be strongly impressed with many beautiful ideas of morality, and still to remain an inflexible enemy to the Gospel. Rusticus undertook to persuade Justin to obey the gods and to comply with the emperor's edicts.—The martyr defended the reasonableness of his religion.—Upon which the governor enquired in what kind of learning and discipline he had been educated. He told him, that he had endeavoured to understand all kinds of discipline, and had tried all methods of learning, but finding satisfaction in none of them, he at last had found rest in the Christian doctrine, however fashionable it might be to despise it. Wretch! replies the indignant magistrate, art thou captivated then by **THAT RELIGION**? I am, says Justin; I follow the Christians, and their doctrine is right. “What is their doctrine?” It is this; we believe the one only God to be the Creator of all things visible and invisible; and we confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of God; foretold by the prophets of old; and that he is now the Saviour, teacher, and master of all those who are duly submissive to his instructions, and that he will hereafter be the Judge of mankind.—As for myself, I am too mean to be able to say any thing becoming his infinite Deity: This was the business of the prophets, who, many ages ago, had foretold the coming of the Son of God into the world. “Where do the Christians usually assemble?” The God of the Christians is not confined to any particular place. “In what place do you instruct your scholars?” Justin mentioned the place in which he dwelt, and told him that there he explained Christianity to all who resorted to him. The prefect having severally examined his companions, again addressed Justin. “Hear thou, who hast the character of an orator, and imaginest thyself to be in the possession of truth. If I scourge thee from head to foot, thinkest thou that thou shalt go to heaven?” Although I suffer what you threaten, yet I expect to enjoy the portion

of all true Christians; as I know that the divine grace and favour is laid up for all such, and shall be so, while the world endures. “Do you think that you shall go to heaven, and receive a reward?” I not only think so, but I know it, and have a certainty of it which excludes all doubt.—Rusticus insisted that they should all go together, and sacrifice to the gods. No man, whose understanding is sound, replies Justin, will desert true religion for the sake of error and impiety. “Unless you comply, you shall be tormented without mercy.” We desire nothing more sincerely than to endure tortures for our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be saved. Hence our happiness is promoted; and we shall have confidence before the awful tribunal of our Lord and Saviour, before which, by the divine appointment, the whole world must appear. The rest assented, and said,—“Dispatch quickly your purpose, we are Christians, and cannot sacrifice to idols.” The governor then pronounced sentence,—“As to those, who refuse to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the imperial edicts, let them be first scourged, and then beheaded according to the laws.” The martyrs rejoiced and blessed God, and being led back to prison, were whipped and afterwards beheaded. Their dead bodies were taken by Christian friends, and decently interred.

Martyrdom
of Justin,
&c.

A. D.

163.

Thus slept in Jesus the Christian philosopher Justin, about the year 163, and about the third or fourth year of the reign of Marcus. Like many of the ancient fathers, he appears to us under the greatest disadvantage. Works really his have been lost; and others have been ascribed to him; part of which are not his; and the rest, at least, of ambiguous authority. He is the first Christian since the Apostles days, who added to an unquestionable zeal and love for the Gospel, the character of a man of learning and philosophy. His early habits were retained; and yet were consecrated to the service of God. This man, surely, should not be suspected of unreasonable imp

and fancies. His religion was the effect of serious and long deliberation : and the very best and most important use which a gentleman and a scholar can make of his rational faculties,—namely,—to determine his choice in religion,—was made by Justin. He examined the various philosophic sects, not merely for the purpose of amusement or ostentation, but to find out God ; and in God true happiness : He tried and found them all wanting : He sought him in the Gospel : He found him there : He confessed him : He gave up every thing for him : He was satisfied with his choice ; and he died in serenity. His persevering in the profession of philosophy might probably have another view besides the gratification of his own taste : He might hope to conciliate the affections of philosophers, and allure them to Christianity. The charity of his heart appears indeed to have been great : He prayed for all men : He declined no dangers for the good of souls ; and he involved himself in disputes with philosophers for their benefit, to his own extreme hazard. His house was open for the instruction of all who consulted him ; though he seems to have never assumed the ecclesiastical character. To draw gentlemen and persons of liberal education to pay attention to Christianity, appears to have been his chief employment. But he found it easier to provoke opposition, and to throw away his own life, than to persuade a single philosopher to become a Christian. The danger of learned pride, the vanity of hoping to disarm the enmity of the wise of this world by the most charitable concessions, and the incurable prejudice of the great against the humble religion of Jesus, are much illustrated by his story. So is the victorious efficacy of Divine Grace, which singled out Justin from a race of men, of all others the most opposite to Christ. We have seen a philosopher persecuted to death : informed against by one of his brethren ; condemned by another, and suffering by the authority of an emperor, who gloried more in the philosophic than in the imperial name. A man of his

learning and sagacity should not rashly be supposed destitute of argument and system in his views. Men of sense will scarcely think the ideas of such a person unworthy of their regard.—Let us see then briefly what were Justin's sentiments in religion. We may possibly be led to conclude that Christian principles may be seriously maintained in consistence with the love of science and letters: though perhaps we may observe some degree of adulteration, which these principles received, by passing through a channel of all others the most unfavourable for the conducting of their course,—the channel of philosophy*.

It is certain that Justin worshipped Christ as the true God in the full and proper sense of the words. We have seen one testimony of it already in his examination before Rusticus. But let the reader hear his own words. Trypho† the Jew finds fault with the Christians on account of this very sentiment. "To me it appears," says he, "a paradox incapable of any sound proof, to say, that this Christ was God before all time; and that then he was made man, and suffered: And to assert that he was any thing more than a man, and of men, appears not only paradoxical, but foolish." "I know," answered Justin, "that it appears paradoxical; and particularly to those of your nation, who are determined neither to know nor do the will of God, but to follow the inventions of your teachers, as God declares of you. However, if I could not demonstrate that he existed before all time, being God the Son of the Maker of the universe, and that he was made man of the Virgin; yet, as this personage was shown by every sort of proof to be the Christ of God, be the question

* It scarcely need be repeated, that by this term I mean all along that philosophy of the ancients, which was founded in pride, was chiefly speculative and metaphysical, and at bottom atheistical:—no one objects to those moral maxims of the ancient philosophers, which were in many instances excellent, though defective in principle.

† Dialogue, P. 63.

as it may respecting his Divinity and Humanity, you have no right to deny that he is the Christ of God, even if he were only mere man : you could only say, that I was mistaken in my idea of his character. For there are some who call themselves Christians, who confess him to be the Christ, but still maintain that he is a mere man only, with whom I agree not ; neither do most of those who bear that name agree with them ; because we are commanded by Christ himself not to obey the precepts of men, but his own injunctions, and those of the holy prophets.” “ Those,” says Trypho, “ who say that he was man only, and that he was in a particular manner anointed, and made Christ, appear to me to speak more rationally than you. For we all expect Christ a man, of men ; and that Elias will come to anoint him.”—The purport of this whole passage is plain : The GENERAL body of Christians in the second century held the proper Deity of Jesus Christ : They believed that this was a part of Old Testament revelation ; and they looked on a small number, who held his mere humanity, to be men who preferred human teachers to divine. They considered the Jews also, the most implacable enemies of Christianity, as choosing to be directed rather by human teachers than by the divine oracles ; and as inexcusable in denying the Divine Mission of Christ, whatever opinion they might have formed of his person.—Let the learned reader judge for himself, by turning to the passage in Justin, whether it will not bear the weight which I have laid upon it.—The testimony of a man so thoughtful, judicious, and honest as Justin, must be decisive, or nearly so ; and therefore, must, in a great measure, determine the question much agitated in our times, relative to the opinion of the Ancients, concerning the person of Christ.

In another part of the same dialogue*, he speaks of Christ as the God of Israel who was with Moses ;

* P. 56.

and explains his meaning when he said that true Christians regarded what they were taught by the prophets. In his first Apology, he tells the emperor in WHAT SENSE Christians were Atheists: They did not worship the gods commonly so called, but they* worshipped and adored the true God, and his Son, and the prophetic Spirit, honouring them in word and in truth. If those, who call themselves Unitarians, were as candid and impartial as they profess, the controversy concerning the Trinity would be soon at an end.—That the primitive Christians worshipped one God alone, all who espouse the doctrine of the Trinity will allow. Let the Unitarians with equal frankness acknowledge that they worshipped the one God in the three persons just now mentioned; and then we have the Trinity in Unity. Further—Justin uses two terms usually expressive of that worship and adoration, which incommunicably belongs to the Deity†.—But, till there be a disposition in men, without disputation, to humble themselves before divine Revelation, neither frankness in concession, nor unity of sentiment, is to be expected.

The all-important doctrine of Justification he states ‡ in the same manner as St. Paul does; believing, that to press the necessity of Mosaic rites on others was to fall from the faith of Christ. The learned reader may see more at large his views of Regeneration and Forgiveness of all past sins through Christ Jesus§, and how extremely different they were from the nominal Christianity which contents so many persons.

He appears to have had the clearest views of that special illumination, without which no man will understand and relish real godliness. His first unknown instructor had taught him this; and he seems never to have forgotten it. He informs Trypho,—that, for their wickedness, God had hidden from the Jews

* P. 137. † Εἰδομεθα καὶ Προσκυνῶμεν. ‡ Dialogue 62.

§ 1st Apology 159, 160, and 68 Dialogue.

the power of knowing divine wisdom, except from a remnant, who according to the grace of his compassion were reserved, that their nation might not be like Sodom and Gomorrah.—The eternal punishment of the wicked he avows so plainly, that I shall spare quotations upon that subject.

In fundamentals he was unquestionably sound: Yet there seems, however, something in his train of thinking, which was the effect of his philosophic spirit; and which produced notions not altogether agreeable to the genius of the Gospel. Thus, toward the close of the second Apology, he declares that the doctrines of Plato were not heterogeneous to those of Christ; but only NOT ALTOGETHER similar. And he seems to assert, that Plato, and the Stoics, and the Pagan writers, in prose and verse, saw something of truth from the portion of the seed of the Divine Word, which he makes to be the same as the Word, the only begotten Son of God. The reader, who chuses to consult the last folio page of the Apology, may judge for himself, whether he does not there confound together two things perfectly distinct,—the light of natural conscience which God has given to all men;—and the light of divine grace peculiar to the children of God. Certain it is that St. Paul, who speaks of both, in the epistle to the Romans, always carefully distinguishes them, as of a kind entirely different one from the other. He never allows unconverted men to have any portion at all of that light which is peculiarly Christian: But thus it was that this excellent man seems to have forgotten the guard, which can scarcely be too often repeated, against philosophy. We may see hereafter how mystics and heretics and platonizing Christians jumbled these things together entirely, and what attempts were made by the philosophers to incorporate their doctrine of the *To ἦν* with the Gospel*.

* An abstruse and mystical opinion, which prevailed very generally among the ancient philosophers; but which it is difficult to make intelligible by an explanation. It differs, however, very little, if at all, from downright Atheism.

Justin seems, unwarily, to have given them some handle for this : and, if I mistake not, he was the first sincere Christian who was seduced by human philosophy to adulterate the Gospel, though in a small degree. It should ever be remembered, that Christian light stands single and unmixed ; and will not bear to be kneaded into the same mass with other systems, religious or philosophical.—We may here mark the beginning of the decay of the first SPIRITUAL EFFUSION among the Gentiles, through false wisdom : as, long before,—namely,—from the first council of Jerusalem,—we noticed a similar decay in the Jewish Church, through self-righteousness.

The same prejudice in favour of the instructor of his youth leads him to pay to Socrates a very great compliment, as if that extraordinary man had really known the true God, and had lost his life for attempting to draw men from idolatry.—Whereas almost every line of the narrative left us by his disciples shows, that he was as much an idolater as the rest of his countrymen.—The last words he uttered, it is well known, were entirely idolatrous.—Justin had not learnt so fully as St. Paul would have taught him, that “ the world by wisdom knew not God.” In the last page of his *Trypho* there is also a phraseology extremely suspicious. He speaks of a self-determining power in man*, and uses much the same kind of reasoning on the obscure subject of free-will as has been fashionable with many since the days of Arminius. He seems to have been the first of all sincere Christians, who introduced this foreign plant into Christian ground. I shall venture to call it foreign till its right to exist in the soil shall be proved from scriptural evidence.—It is very plain that I do not mistake his meaning,—because he never explicitly owns the doctrine of Election ; though, with happy inconsistency, like many other real Christians, he involved it in his experience, and implies it in various parts of his writings.

But,—the novelty, once admitted, was

* ΑΥΤΕΓΧΕΙΟΝ.

expelled :—The language of the Church was silently and gradually changed, in this respect, from that more simple and scriptural mode of speaking used by Clement and Ignatius : Those primitive Christians knew the doctrine of the Election of Grace, but not the self-determining power of the human will :—We shall see hereafter the progress of the evil, and its arrival at full maturity under the fostering hand of Pelagius.

CHAP. IV.

THE EMPEROR MARCUS ANTONINUS, AND HIS PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS.

Marcus
Antoninus
made em-
peror ;

A. D.
161.

HE succeeded Pius in the year 161, and appears very soon after to have commenced the persecution against the Christians, in which Justin and his friends were slain. It excites a curiosity, not foreign from the design of this History, to discover what could be the cause of so much enmity against a people, confessedly harmless, in a prince so considerate, so humane, and, in general, so well-intentioned as Marcus is allowed to have been.—Besides ; he acted in this respect directly contrary to the example of his predecessor, whose memory he doubtless much revered, from whose intelligent and investigating spirit he must have derived ample information concerning the Christians, and whom in all other matters of government he imitated so exactly. The fact, however, is certainly so : Marcus Antoninus was, during all his reign, which continued 19 years, an implacable persecutor of Christians ; and this not from mere ignorance of their moral character.—He knew them,—yet hated them, and showed them no mercy : He allowed and encouraged the most barbarous treatment of their persons ; and was yet himself a person of great humanity of temper : just and beneficent to the rest of mankind : He was free from all reproach in his general conduct ; and in several parts of it was a model worthy the imitation even of Christians.

I think it impossible to solve this phenomenon on any other principles than those by which the enmity of many philosophers of old, and of many devotees and exact moralists of modern times against the Christian religion, is to be explained. The Gospel is in its own nature not only distinct from careless and dissolute vice, but also from the whole religion of philosophers: I mean of those philosophers who form to themselves a religion from natural and self-devised sources, either in opposition to the revealed word of God, or with the neglect both of that word and of the influence of the Holy Spirit, who is the great agent in applying the Scriptures to the heart of man.—In all ages it will be found that the more strenuously men support SUCH RELIGION, the more vehemently do they hate Christianity. Their religion is pride and self-importance: It denies the fallen state of man, the provision and efficacy of grace, and the glory of God and the Redeemer.—The enmity hence occasioned is obvious.—It must be considered also, that Marcus Antoninus was of the Stoical sect,—who carried self-sufficiency to the utmost pitch.

He fancied that he carried God within him. Like most of the philosophers, he held the mystical doctrine of the *To ſi*; but he held it in all its detestable impiety and arrogance. With him to be good and virtuous was the easiest thing in the world: It was only to follow nature, and to obey the dictates of the Deity,—that is, of the human soul, which was divine and self-sufficient. With these views, he could neither be humble; nor pray earnestly; nor feel his own internal wickedness and misery; nor endure the idea of a Saviour and Mediator.—If, like his predecessor, Pius, he had been contented to be an ordinary person in religion, the humanity of his temper would PROBABLY have led him, as it did the emperor Pius, to have respected the excellent character and virtues of Christians; and he would have felt it his duty to have protected such peaceable and deserving subjects.—I say, PROBABLY; and I express my

some reserve, because I much doubt, whether he possessed an understanding equally sound with that of Antoninus Pius.—But, be that as it may, the pride of philosophy appears to have been wounded and exasperated. Whoever has attended to the spirit which pervades his twelve Books of Meditations, and duly compared them with the doctrines of the Gospel, must acknowledge a total opposition; and then he will not wonder that Christians suffered from a serious Stoic, what might have been expected only from a flagitious Nero.—Pride and licentiousness are equally condemned by the Gospel; and they equally seek revenge.—If this be a true state of the case, the philosophic spirit, explained and stated as above, however differently modified in different ages, will always be inimical to the Gospel; and the most decorous moralists belonging to the class of which we are now speaking, will be found in union, on this subject, with the basest characters. “Beware of philosophy,” is a precept which as much calls for our attention now as ever.

Yet so fascinating is the power of prejudice and education, that many would look on it as a grievous crime to attempt to tear the laurels of virtue from the brow of Marcus Antoninus. Certainly, however, if his virtue had been genuine; or at all of a piece with that of the Scriptures, he could never have treated Christians so cruelly, as we shall see he did.

Is this, then, the man, whom Mr. Pope celebrates in the following lines?

Who noble ends by noble means obtains,
Or failing, smiles in exile or in chains,
Like good* Aurelius let him reign, or bleed
Like Socrates, that man is great indeed.

—Providence seems however to have determined, that those who, in contradiction to the feelings of human nature, dark and indigent as it is, and needing a divine illumination, will yet proudly exalt their own ability and sufficiency, shall be frustrated and put to

* Antoninus was called also Aurelius.

shame. Socrates, with his last breath, gave a sanction to the most absurd idolatry: and Aurelius was guilty of such deeds as human nature shudders to relate.

It is remarkable that Gataker, the editor of Antoninus's *Meditations*, represents himself in the most humiliating terms, as quite ashamed to behold the superior virtues of this prince as described in this book.—To say and to do, are, however, not the same things; nor is there much reason to believe, that Marcus performed in practice, what he describes in theory.—But exclusively of these reflections, suppose we were inclined to draw a comparison between the author and his commentator with respect to humility, such comparison would certainly be much to the disadvantage of the former. I pretend not to have studied the writings of Marcus Aurelius with so much anxious care as to be assured, that there appear in them no traces of this virtue in the emperor; but the GENERAL TURN of the whole book leads me to conclude, that the writer felt no abasing thoughts of himself. I have already defined in what sense I use the term philosopher, as contrasted with the humble follower of Jesus Christ; and in that sense I affirm that no philosopher made such a confession of himself as Gataker does.—Such is the natural effect of some knowledge of Christianity on the human mind!

If we attend to the notices of history on the education and manners of Marcus, the account which has been given of his enmity against the Gospel will be amply confirmed. Adrian had introduced him among the Salian priests when eight years old, and he became accurately versed in the rituals of his priesthood. At twelve he began to wear the philosopher's cloak: he practised austerities: he lay on the bare ground; and was with difficulty persuaded by his mother to use a mattress and slight coverlet. He placed in his private chapel gold statues of his deceased masters; and visited their sepulchral monuments; and there offered sacrifices, and flowers. So devoted was he to Stoicism.

attended the schools after he became emperor ; and the faith which he put in dreams sufficiently proves his superstitious credulity. From a man so much lifted up by self-sufficiency, bigotry, and superstition, an illiberal censure of the Christians* is not matter of surprise. “ This readiness,” says he, “ of being resigned to the prospect of death, ought to proceed from a propriety of deliberate judgment, not from mere unintelligent obstinacy, as is the case with the Christians; it should be founded on grounds of solid reason, and be attended with calm composure without any tragical raptures, and in such a way as may induce others to admire and imitate.” If this emperor had ever attended, with any degree of candour and impartiality, to the dying scenes of Christians tortured to death by his orders, he might have seen all these circumstances exemplified. Thousands of them chose to suffer with deliberate judgment ; preferred heavenly things to earthly ; counted the cost ; and made a reasonable decision ; not doubtful, as the emperor was, concerning a future life ; but calmly resigning this life in firm expectation of a better, and without any circumstances to justify the suspicion of pride or ostentation ; on the contrary, they were adorned with meekness, cheerfulness, and charity. — Hence thousands and ten thousands have been induced to examine what that hidden energy of Christian life must be, which produces such exalted sentiments and such grandeur of spirit. In fact the power of prejudice was never more strongly exhibited than in this malignant censure of Antoninus ; which in truth is the more inexcusable, because he laboured under no involuntary ignorance of Christians. For, besides the knowledge of them which he must have acquired under his predecessor, he had an opportunity of knowing them from various Apologies published in his own reign. Justin’s second Apology, as we have seen, was published during his reign ; one sentence of which demonstrates, in how striking a

* 11th B. Sect. 3.

manner our Saviour's prophecy was then fulfilled, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household!"—Every where, he observes, if a Gentile was re-proved by a father or relation, he would revenge himself by informing against the reprover; in consequence of which he was liable to be dragged before the governor, and put to death. Tatian also, Athenagoras, Apollinaris bishop of Hierapolis, and Theophilus of Antioch, and Melito of Sardis, published Apologies. This last published his about the year 177, of which some valuable remains are preserved in Eusebius. A part of his address to Marcus deserves our attention*, both on account of the justness of the sentiments, and the politeness with which they are delivered. "Pious persons, aggrieved by new edicts published throughout Asia, and never before practised, now suffer persecution. For audacious sycophants, and men who covet other persons goods, take advantage of these proclamations openly to rob and spoil the innocent by night and by day. If this be done through your order,—let it stand good;—for a just emperor cannot act unjustly; and we will cheerfully submit to the honour of such a death:—This only we humbly crave of your Majesty, that, after an impartial examination of us and of our accusers, you would justly decide whether we deserve death and punishment, or life and protection. But, if these proceedings be not yours, and the new edicts be not the effects of your personal judgment,—edicts which ought not to be enacted even against barbarian enemies,—in that case we entreat you not to despise us, who are thus unjustly oppressed." He afterwards reminds him of the justice done to Christians by his two immediate predecessors†.

Apologies
for Chris-
tians :

A. D.
177.

* B. iv. C. 25.

† It can make no material difference, whether these edicts were absolutely new, or whether they were only the continuation of former edicts, with the knowledge and support, or even the connivance of Marcus :

1. It is with pain that I read in a celebrated author, the *Meditations of Marcus Antoninus* have contributed

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From this account it is evident that Marcus, by new edicts, commenced the persecution, and that it was carried on with merciless barbarity in those Asiatic regions which had been relieved by Pius. There is nothing pleasant that can be suggested to us by this view of the cruel treatment of Christians, and of the author of it, except one circumstance—that the effusion of the Spirit of God still continued to produce its holy fruits in those highly-favoured regions.

In the two next chapters I propose to describe distinctly two scenes of this emperor's persecution; and I shall now conclude this general account of him, with briefly mentioning the remarkable story of his danger and relief in the war of the Marcomanni*. He and his army being hemmed in by the enemy, were ready to perish with thirst; when suddenly a storm of thunder and lightning affrighted the enemies, whilst the rain refreshed the Romans. It is evident that the victory was obtained by a remarkable providential interposition. The Christian soldiers in his army, we are sure, in their distress

Aurelius
conquers
the Marco-
manni :

A. D.
174.

perhaps to the general admiration of his character, than all the different transactions of his JUST, MERCIFUL and BENEFICENT reign.”—Adam Smith's Moral Sent. Vol. I. p. 416.

2. Let the Christian reader compare this with Mosheim, Cent. II. Part I. Ch. II. sect. 5: “Most writers,” says he, “have celebrated Marcus beyond measure, on account of his extraordinary wisdom and virtue. It is not however in his conduct towards the Christians that we are to look for the reasons of these pompous encomiums; for here the clemency and justice of that emperor suffers a strange eclipse.... So that if we except Nero, there was no reign under which the Christians were more injuriously and cruelly treated.... Among the victims of his persecution, were the holy and venerable Polycarp bishop of Smyrna; and also Justin Martyr, so deservedly renowned for his erudition and philosophy.”

3. Consult also Lardner's Testim. 4to Vol. II. 215: “Marcus certainly deserves to be reckoned among the persecuting emperors. The governor in Gaul applied to him for directions, and he wrote back, that they who confessed themselves Christians should be put to death, but that they who denied it, might be set at liberty.”

4. There is no doubt of the authenticity of this last-mentioned rescript; and it is an indelible blot on the memory of this celebrated emperor.

* Euseb. B. v. C. 5.

would pray to their God, even if Eusebius had not told us so. All Christian writers speak of the relief as vouchsafed in answer to their prayers, and no real Christian will doubt of the soundness of their judgment in this point. I have only to add, that Marcus, in a manner agreeable to his usual superstition, ascribed his deliverance to HIS gods. Each party judged according to their own views; and those moderns who ascribe the whole to the ordinary powers of nature, or to accident, judge also according to THEIR usual profaneness or irreligious turn of thinking. Whether the Divine interposition deserves to be called a miracle or not, is a question rather concerning propriety of language than religion. This seems to me all that is needful to be said on a fact, which on one side has been magnified beyond all bounds; and on the other has been reduced to mere insignificance. It happened in the year 174. The emperor lived five years after this event, and as far as appears, continued a persecutor to the last.

CHAP. V.

MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP.

IN or about the year 167, the sixth of Marcus, Smyrna was distinguished by the martyrdom of her bishop, Polycarp.

Martyrdom
of Poly-
carp,

A. D.

167.

We mentioned him before in the account of Ignatius. He had succeeded Bucolus, a vigilant and industrious bishop, in the charge of Smyrna. The Apostles,—and we may suppose St. John particularly,—ordained him to this office. He had been familiarly conversant with the Apostles, and received the government of the Church from them. He had been eye-witnesses and ministers of our Lord.

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continually taught that which he had been taught by them*. Usher† has laboured to show‡ that he was the ANGEL of the church of Smyrna addressed by our Saviour. If he be right in this, the character of Polycarp is indeed delineated by a hand divine; and the martyrdom before us was particularly predicted. By this account he must have presided 74 years over that Church:—certainly, as we shall hereafter see, his age must have been extremely great: he long survived his friend Ignatius; and was reserved to suffer by Marcus Antoninus. Some time before that event he came to Rome to hold a conference with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, concerning the time of observing Easter. The matter was soon decided between them, as all matters should be, which enter not into the essence of godliness. They each observed their own customs without any breach of charity between them, real or apparent. But Polycarp found more important employment while at Rome. The heresy of Marcion was strong in that city; and the testimony and zealous labours of one who had known so much of the Apostles were successfully employed against it; and many were reclaimed. It was not in Marcion's power to undermine the authority of this venerable Asiatic. To procure a seeming coalition was the utmost he could expect; and it was as suitable to his views to attempt this, as it was to those of Polycarp to oppose such duplicity and artifice. Meeting him one day in the street, he called out to him, "Polycarp, own us." "I do own thee," says the zealous bishop, "to be the first-born of Satan." I refer the reader to what has been said already of St. John's similar conduct on such occasions; and shall add only that Irenæus, from whom Eusebius relates the story, commends his conduct, and speaks of it as commonly practised by the Apostles and their followers. Irenæus informs

* Euseb. iv. 14.

† In his Prolegom. to Ignatius.

‡ Cave's Life of Polycarp.

us*, that he had a particular delight in recounting what had been told by those who had seen Christ in the flesh; that he used to relate also what he had heard concerning his doctrine and miracles; and when he was informed of any heretical attempts to overturn Christian fundamentals, he would cry out, "To what times, O God, hast thou reserved me!" and would leave the place.

Indeed when it is considered what Marcion maintained, and what unquestionable evidence Polycarp had against him in point of matter of fact, we shall see he had just reason to testify his disapprobation. This man was one of the DocETÆ: According to him, Christ had no real human nature: He rejected the whole Old Testament, and mutilated the New. He held two principles, after the manner of the Manichees, in order to account for the origin of evil. If men, who assert things so fundamentally subversive of the Gospel, would openly disavow the Christian name, they might be endured with much more composure by Christians; nor would there be any call for so scrupulous an absence from their society;—for St. Paul has so determined the case†. But for such men, whether ancient or modern, to call themselves Christians, is an intolerable insult on the common sense of mankind.—We know nothing more of the life of this venerable bishop:—Of the circumstances of his death we have an account, and they deserve a very particular relation.

The greatest part of the antient narrative is preserved by Eusebius‡. The beginning and the end, which he has not given us, have been restored by the care of archbishop Usher. It is an epistle written in the name of Polycarp's Church of Smyrna: I have ventured to translate the whole myself, yet not without examining what Valesius, the editor of

* Irenæus's Epistle to Florin.

† 1 Cor.

‡ B. iv. Euseb. Hist. ch. 15.

for when the proconsul besought him to pity his own old age, he irritated the wild beasts by provocation, and was desirous of departing more quickly from a world of wickedness.—And now the whole multitude, astonished at the fortitude of Christians, that is, of the true friends and worshippers of God, cried out, “Take away the atheists*, let Polycarp be sought for.” One Christian, by name Quintus, lately come from Phrygia, his native country, on sight of the beasts, trembled. He had persuaded some persons to present themselves before the tribunal of their own accord. Him the proconsul, by soothing speeches, induced to swear and to sacrifice. On this account, brethren, we do not approve of those who offer themselves to martyrdom;—“for we have not so learned Christ.”

“The admirable Polycarp, when he heard what passed, was quite unmoved, and resolved to remain in the city. But, induced by the intreaties of his people, he retired to a village at no great distance; and there, with a few friends, he spent his time entirely, day and night, in praying, according to his usual custom, for all the churches in the world.—Three days before he was seized, he had a vision while he was praying: He saw his pillow consumed by fire: and turning to the company, he said prophetically, “I must be burnt alive.”—Upon hearing that the persons, in search of him, were just at hand, he retired to another village: Immediately the officers came to his house; and not finding him, they seized two servants, one of whom was induced, by torture, to confess the place of his retreat. Certainly it was impossible to conceal him, since even those of his own household discovered him. And the tetrarch, called Cleronomus Herod, hastened to introduce him into the Stadium; that so he might obtain his lot as a follower of Christ; and that those, who betrayed him, might share with Judas. Taking

* The term of reproach then commonly affixed to Christians.

then the servant as their guide, they went out about supper-time, with their usual arms, as against a robber; and arriving late, they found him lying in an upper room at the end of the house, whence he might have made his escape*, but he would not, saying,—“The will of the Lord be done.” Hearing that they were arrived, he came down and conversed with them; and all, who were present, admired his age and constancy: Some said, “Is it worth while to take pains to apprehend so aged a person?” He immediately ordered meat and drink to be set before them, as much as they pleased, and begged them to allow him one hour to pray without molestation; which being granted, he prayed standing; and was so full of the grace of God, that he could not cease from speaking for two hours: The hearers were astonished; and many of them repented that they were come to seize so divine a character.

“When he had finished his prayers, having made mention of all whom he had ever known, small and great, noble and vulgar, and of the whole Catholic church throughout the world, the hour of departing being come, they set him on an ass and led him to the city†. The irenarch Herod, and his father Nicetes, met him, who taking him up into their chariot, began to advise him, asking, “What harm is it to say, Lord Cæsar!—and to sacrifice, and be safe?” At first he was silent, but being pressed, he said, “I will not follow your advice.” When they could not persuade him, they treated him abusively, and thrust him out of the chariot, so that in falling he bruised his thigh. But he, still unmoved as if he had suffered nothing, went on cheerfully under the conduct of his guards to the Stadium. There the tumult

* Those who know the eastern custom of flat-roofed houses, will not be surprised at this.

† I have not thought it worth while to translate what relates to the time when Polycarp suffered, on which point the learned disagree in the mode of interpretation.

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being so great that few could hear any thing, a voice from heaven said to Polycarp, as he entered on the Stadium, “* Be strong, Polycarp, and behave yourself like a man.”—None saw the speaker, but many of us heard the voice.”

Martyrdom
of Poly-
carp.

“ When he was brought to the tribunal, there was a great tumult, as soon as it was generally understood that Polycarp was apprehended. The proconsul asked him, if he was Polycarp; to which he assented. The former then began to exhort him:—“ Have pity on thy own great age—and the like. Swear by the fortune of Cæsar—repent—say—Take away the atheists.” Polycarp, with a grave aspect, beholding all the multitude, waving his hand to them, and looking up to heaven, said “ Take away the atheists.” The proconsul urging him, and saying, “ Swear, and I will release thee,—reproach Christ;” Polycarp said, “ Eighty-and-six years have I served him, and he hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?” The proconsul still urging, “ Swear by the fortune of Cæsar;” Polycarp said, “ If you still vainly contend to make me swear by the fortune of Cæsar, as you speak, affecting an ignorance of my real character, hear me frankly declaring what I am: I am a Christian; and if you desire to learn the Christian doctrine, assign me a day, and hear.” The proconsul said, “ Persuade the people.” Polycarp said, “ I have thought proper to address you; for we are taught to pay to magistracies and powers appointed by God, all honour, which is consistent with a good conscience. But I do not hold them worthy that I should apologize before them †.” “ I have wild beasts,” says the proconsul: “ I will expose you to them, unless you repent.” “ Call them,” replies the martyr. “ Our

* The reader should remember that miraculous interpositions of various kinds were still frequent in the church.

† I cannot think that this was said in contempt of the vulgar, but on account of the prejudice and enmity which their conduct exhibited at that time.

minds are not to be changed from the better to the worse: but it is a good thing to be changed from evil to good." "I will tame your spirit by fire;" says the other, "since you despise the wild beasts, unless you repent." "You threaten me with fire," answers Polycarp, "which burns for a moment, and will be soon extinct; but you are ignorant of the future judgment, and of the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Do what you please." Saying this and more, he was filled with confidence and joy; and grace shone in his countenance: so that he was far from being confounded by these menaces: On the contrary the proconsul was visibly embarrassed: he sent, however, the herald to proclaim thrice, in the midst of the assembly, "Polycarp hath professed himself a Christian." Upon this all the multitude, both of Gentiles and of Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, with insatiate rage shouted aloud, "This is the doctor of Asia, the father of Christians, the subverter of our gods, who hath taught many not to sacrifice nor to adore." They now begged Philip, the Asiarch, to let out a lion against Polycarp. But he refused, observing, that the amphitheatrical spectacles of the wild beasts were finished. They then unanimously shouted, that he should be burnt alive;—for his vision was of necessity to be accomplished.—Whilst he was praying, he observed the fire kindling; and turning to the faithful that were with him, he said prophetically,—“I must be burnt alive.” The business was executed with all possible speed; for the people immediately gathered fuel from the workshops and baths, in which employment the Jews* distinguished themselves with their usual malice. As soon as the fire was prepared, stripping off his

* I scarcely know a more striking view of the judicial curse inflicted on the Jews than this. Indeed this people all along exerted themselves in persecution; and Justin Martyr tells us of a charge which had been sent from Jerusalem by the chief priests against Christians, directed to their brethren in the world.

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clothes, and loosing his girdle, he attempted to take off his shoes,—a thing unusual for him to do formerly,—because each of the faithful were wont to strive who should be most assiduous in serving him. For, before his martyrdom, his integrity and blameless conduct had always procured him the most unfeigned respect. Immediately the usual appendages of burning were placed about him. And when they were going to fasten him to the stake, he said, “Let me remain as I am; for He who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without your securing me with nails, to remain unmoved in the fire.” Upon which they bound him without nailing him. And he, putting his hands behind him, and being bound as a distinguished ram, selected from a great flock, a burnt-offering acceptable to God Almighty, said, “O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have attained the knowledge of thee, O God of angels and principalities, and of all creation, and of all the just who live in thy sight, I bless thee, that thou hast counted me worthy of this day, and this hour, to receive my portion in the number of martyrs, in the cup of Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life both of soul and body, in the incorruption of the Holy Ghost; among whom may I be received before thee this day as a sacrifice well-savoured and acceptable, which thou, the faithful and true God, hast prepared, promised beforehand, and fulfilled accordingly. Wherefore I praise thee for all those things, I bless thee, I glorify thee, by the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy well-beloved Son: through whom, with him in the Holy Spirit, be glory to thee both now and for ever. AMEN.”

“And when he had pronounced Amen aloud, and finished his prayer, the officers lighted the fire; and a great flame bursting out,—We, to whom it was given to see, and who also were reserved to relate to others that which happened,—saw a wonder—For

the flame, forming the appearance of an arch, as the sail of a vessel filled with wind, was as a wall round about the body of the martyr; which was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but as gold and silver refined in the furnace. We received also in our nostrils such a fragrance, as arises from frankincense, or some other precious perfume. At length the impious, observing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, ordered the confector* to approach, and to plunge his sword into his body. Upon this a quantity of blood gushed out, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the multitude were astonished to see the difference thus providentially made between the unbelievers and the elect; of whom the admirable personage before us was, doubtless, one, in our age an apostolical and prophetical teacher, the bishop of the Catholic church of Smyrna. For, whatever he declared, was fulfilled and will be fulfilled. But the envious, malignant, and spiteful enemy of the just, observed the honour put on his martyrdom, and his blameless life; and knowing that he was now crowned with immortality and the prize of unquestionable victory, studied to prevent us from obtaining his body, though many of us longed to have communion† with his sacred flesh. For some persons suggested to Nicetes, the father of Herod, and the brother of Alce‡, to go to the pro-consul, and intreat him not to deliver the body to the Christians, “lest, said they, leaving the Crucified One, they should begin to worship him.” And

* An officer, whose business it was in the Roman games to dispatch any beast that was unruly or dangerous.

† I see no ground for the well-known Papistical inference hence usually drawn respecting the virtues ascribed to relics. To express an affectionate regard to the deceased by a decent attention to the funeral rites, is all that is necessarily meant by the expression.

‡ Alce is spoken of with honour in Ignatius's Epistle to the Smyrneans. She it seems, had found, in her nearest relations, inveterate foes to whatever she held dear.

they said these things upon the suggestions and arguments of the Jews, who also watched us, when we were going to take his body from the pile; unacquainted indeed with our views, namely, that it is not possible for us to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of all who are saved of the human race, nor ever to worship any other *. For we adore HIM as being the Son of God; but we justly love the martyrs as disciples of the Lord, and followers of him, on account of that distinguished affection which they bore towards their King and their Teacher;—and may we be ranked at last in their number! The Centurion, perceiving the malevolence of the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire, and burnt it. Then we gathered up his bones,—more precious than gold and jewels,—and deposited them in a proper place; where, if it be possible, we shall meet, and the Lord will grant us, in gladness and joy, to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom, both in commemoration of those who have wrestled before us and for the instruction and confirmation of those who come after †. Thus far concerning the blessed Polycarp.—Eleven brethren from Philadelphia suffered with him,—but he alone is particularly celebrated by all:—Even by Gentiles he is spoken of in every place. He was in truth, not only an illustrious teacher, but also an eminent martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, because it was regulated exactly by evangelical principles. For by patience he conquered the unjust magistrate; and thus receiving the crown of immortality, and exulting with Apostles and all the righteous, he glorifies God, even the Father, and blesses our Lord, even the Ruler of

* The faith of Christ, and a just honour paid to true Christians, abstracted from superstition and idolatry, appear in the passage.

† If we were in our times subject to such sufferings, I suspect these anniversary martyrdoms of antiquity might be thought useful to us also. The superstition of after-times appears not, think, in this epistle.

our bodies, and the Shepherd of his Church dispersed through the world.—You desired a full account; and we, for the present, have sent you, what will, perhaps, be thought a compendious one, by our brother Mark. When you have read it, send it to the brethren beyond you, that they also may glorify the Lord, who makes selections from his own servants of holy men, who shall thus honour him by their deaths. To him who is able to conduct us all by his grace and free mercy into his heavenly kingdom, by his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, to him be glory, honour, power, majesty, for ever. AMEN. Salute all the saints: those with us salute you, particularly Evaristus the writer, with all his house. Polycarp suffered martyrdom on the second day of the month Xanthicus, on the seventh day before the calends of March, on the great sabbath, at the eighth hour. He was apprehended by Herod, under Philip the Trallian Pontifex, Statius Quadratus being proconsul, but Jesus Christ reigning for ever, to whom be glory, honour, majesty, an eternal throne from age to age! We pray that you may be strong, brethren, walking in the word Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel, with whom be glory to God, even the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of his elected saints, among whom the blessed Polycarp hath suffered martyrdom, with whom may we be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, having followed his steps!

“These things Caius hath transcribed from the copy of Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, who also lived with Irenæus. And I Socrates of Corinth have transcribed from the copy of Caius. Grace be with you all. And I Pionius have transcribed from the fore-mentioned, having made search for it, and received the knowledge of it by a vision of Polycarp, as I shall show in what follows, collecting it when now almost obsolete. So may the Lord Jesus

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gather me with his elect, to whom be glory w
the Father and the Holy Spirit to the ages of ag
AMEN."!!

I thought it not amiss for the English reader to s
the manner in which books were then successive
preserved in the church. Of Irenæus we shall be
more hereafter. Nor ought Pionius's account of l
vision to be hastily slighted, by those who consid
the scarcity of useful writings in those days. Wheth
the case was worthy of such a divine interpositio
we, who indolently enjoy books without end, ca
scarcely be judges. However, if any chuse to add th
to the number of pious frauds, which certainly d
once much abound, the authenticity of the accou
will still, in substance, remain unimpeached, as ve
near the whole of it is in Eusebius. This histori
mentions Metrodorus, a presbyter of the sect
Marcion, who perished in the flames among othe
who suffered at Smyrna. It cannot be denied th
heretics also have had their martyrs. Pride an
obstinacy will in some minds persist even to deat
But as all, who have been classed among heretic
have not been so in reality, Metrodorus might be
very different sort of a man from Marcion.

A comparative view of a sound Christian he
suffering as we have seen Polycarp did, with a Ro
man Stoic or untutored Indian undergoing affliction
where we could have an opportunity of surveying a
circumstances, might show, in a practical light, th
peculiar genius and spirit of Christianity, and i
divine superiority. At the same time, those wh
content themselves with a cold, speculative, and a
they term it, rational religion, may ask themselv
how it would have suited their principles to endur
what Polycarp did;—and whether something
what is falsely called enthusiasm, and which the fore
going epistle breathes so abundantly, be not reall
divine and truly rational in the best sense.

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THE MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE.

*THE flame of the persecution by Antoninus reached a country, which hitherto has afforded us no ecclesiastical materials; I mean that of France, in those times called Gallia. Two neighbouring cities, Vienne and Lyons, appear to have been much favoured with evangelical light and love. Vienne was an ancient Roman colony; Lyons was more modern, and her present bishop was Pothinus. His very name points him out to be a Grecian. Irenæus was a presbyter of Lyons, and seems to have been the author of the epistle which Eusebius has preserved, and which the reader shall see presently. Other names concerned in these events are evidently of Greek extraction, and it is hence most probable that some Asiatic Greeks had been the founders of these Churches. Whoever casts his eye on the map of France, and sees the situation of Lyons, at present the largest and most populous city in that kingdom, next to Paris, may observe how favourable the confluence of the Rhine and the Soane—antiently called the Arar—on which it stands, is for the purposes of commerce †. The navigation of the Mediterranean, in all probability, was conducted by merchants of Lyons and of Smyrna; and, hence, the easy introduction of the Gospel from the latter place and from the other Asiatic churches is apparent. How much God hath blessed the work in France, the accounts of their sufferings will evince. Lyons and Vienne appear to be daughters, of whom their Asiatic mothers needed not to be ashamed.

* Euseb. iv. c. 1.

† When will the moderns, notwithstanding all their ened views and improvements, learn to connect navigation with the propagation of the Gospel?

THE EPISTLE OF THE CHURCHES OF VIENNA
AND LYONS, TO THE BRETHREN IN ASIA
AND PHRYGIA *.

THE servants of Christ, sojourning in Vienna and Lyons in France, to the brethren in Asia propria and Phrygia, who have the same faith and hope of redemption with us, peace, and grace, and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are not competent to describe with accuracy nor is it in our power to express the greatness of the affliction sustained here by the saints, the intense animosity of the heathen against them, and the complicated sufferings of the blessed martyrs. The grand enemy assaulted us with all his might; and by his first essays, exhibited intentions of exercising malice without limits and without control. He had no method untried to habituate his slaves to bloody work, and to prepare them by previous exercises against the servants of God. Christians were absolutely prohibited from appearing, in houses except their own, in baths, in the market or in any public place whatever. The grace of God however, fought for us, preserving the weak and exposing the strong; who, like pillars, were able to withstand him in patience, and to draw the whole fury of the wicked against themselves. These entered into the contest, and sustained every species of pain and reproach. What was heavy to others to them was light, while they were hastening to Christ, evincing indeed, that THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY THAT SHALL BE REVEALED IN US. The first trial was from the people at large; shouts, blows, the dragging of the

* Eusebius does not give the whole of the epistle at length but omits some parts, and interrupts the thread of the narrative. It is not necessary to notice the particular instances.

bodies, the plundering of their goods, casting of stones, and the confining of them within their own houses, and all the indignities which may be expected from a fierce and outrageous multitude, these were magnanimously sustained. And now, being led into the Forum by the tribune and the magistrates, they were examined before all the people, whether they were Christians; and, on pleading guilty, were shut up in prison till the arrival of the governor*. Before him they were at length brought; and he treated us with great savageness of manners. The spirit of Vettius Epagathus, one of the brethren, was roused, a man full of charity both to God and man, whose conduct was so exemplary, though but a youth, that he might justly be compared to old Zacharias: for he walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, a man ever unwearied in acts of beneficence to his neighbours, full of zeal towards God, and fervent in spirit. He could not bear to see so manifest a perversion of justice; but, being moved with indignation, he demanded to be heard in behalf of the brethren, and pledged himself to prove that there was nothing atheistic or impious among them. Those about the tribunal shouted against him: He was a man of quality: and the governor, being vexed and irritated by so equitable a demand from such a person, only asked him if he were a Christian; and this he confessed in the most open manner:—the consequence was, that he was ranked among the martyrs. He was called, indeed, the Advocate of the Christians; but he had an advocate† within, the Holy

* It is probable, but not quite certain, that this governor was Severus, afterwards emperor. The conduct of this governor was worthy of so inhuman a prince.

† It is not easy to translate this, because of the ambiguous use of the term *Παρακλητης* which signifies both a comforter and an advocate. Besides their only advocate in Jesus Christ, Christians have the comfort and power of the Spirit within.

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Spirit more abundantly than Zacharias, which he demonstrated by the fulness of his charity, cheerfully laying down his life in defence of his brethren; for he was, and is still, a genuine disciple of Christ, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth *. The rest began now to be distinguished. The capital martyrs appeared indeed ready for the contest, and discharged their part with all alacrity of mind. Others seemed not so ready; but rather, unexercised, and as yet weak, and unable to sustain the shock of such a contest: Of these, ten in number lapsed, whose case filled us with great and unmeasurable sorrow, and dejected the spirits of those who had not yet been apprehended, who, though they sustained all indignities, yet deserted not the martyrs in their distress. Then we were all much alarmed, because of the uncertain event of confession; not that we dreaded the torments with which we were threatened, but because we looked forward unto the end, and feared the danger of apostasy. Persons were now apprehended daily of such as were counted worthy to fill up the number of the lapsed, so that the most excellent were selected from the two churches, even those by whose labour they had been founded and established †. There were seized at the same time some of our heathen servants,—for the governor had openly ordered us all to be sought for,—who, by the impulse of Satan, fearing the torments which they saw inflicted on the saints, at the suggestion of the soldiers, accused us of eating human flesh, and of various unnatural crimes, and of things not fit even to be mentioned or imagined

* Every man who reads this must see the iniquity and absurdity of the governor! A term of reproach stands in the room of argument. The term Christian has long ceased to be infamous. But the words, Lollard, Puritan, Pietist, and Methodist, have supplied its place.

† Hence I judge that their churches were of no great antiquity.

and such as ought not to be believed of mankind*. These things being divulged, all were incensed even to madness against us; so that if some were formerly more moderate on account of any connexions of blood, affinity, or friendship, they were then transported beyond all bounds with indignation. Now it was that our Lord's word was fulfilled, "The time will come when, whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service." The† holy martyrs now sustained tortures which exceed the powers of description; Satan labouring, by means of these tortures, to extort something slanderous against Christianity. The whole fury of the multitude, the governor, and the soldiers, was spent in a particular manner on Sanctus of Vienne, the deacon; and on Maturus, a late convert indeed, but a magnanimous wrestler in spiritual things; and on Attalus of Pergamus, a man who had ever been the pillar and support of our church‡; and, lastly, on Blandina, through whom Christ showed, that those things, that appear unsightly and contemptible among men, are most honourable in the presence of God, on account of love to his name, exhibited in real energy, and not in boasting and pompous pretences. For while we all feared; and among the rest while her mistress according to the flesh, who herself was one of the noble army of martyrs, dreaded that she would not be able to witness a good confession, because of the weakness of her body, Blandina was endued with so much fortitude, that those, who successively tortured her from morning to night, were quite

* Hence we see again the usual charge of unnatural crimes objected to the Christians, believed in the paroxysm of the persecution, but afterwards generally disclaimed by sober persons.

† Surely they needed much the aid of the heavenly Comforter, promised in those discourses, to enable them to sustain the load of calumny so injurious and distressing.

‡ A farther confirmation of the idea, that the Gospel had been brought into France by the charitable zeal of the primitive Christians.

worn out with fatigue, and owned themselves conquered and exhausted of their whole apparatus of tortures, and were amazed to see her still breathing whilst her body was torn and laid open : they confessed that any single species of the torture would have been sufficient to dispatch her, much more so great a variety as had been applied. But the blessed woman, as a generous wrestler, recovered fresh vigour in the act of confession ; and it was an evident refreshment, support, and an annihilation of all her pains to say, “ I am a Christian, and no evil is committed among us.”

In the mean time Sanctus, having sustained in a manner more than human the most barbarous indignities, while the impious hoped to extort from him something injurious to the Gospel, through the duration and intenseness of his sufferings, resisted with so much firmness, that he would neither tell his own name, nor that of his nation or state, nor whether he was a freeman or slave ; but to every interrogatory he answered in Latin, “ I am a Christian.” This, he repeatedly owned, was to him both name, and state, and race, and every thing ; and nothing else could the heathen draw from him. Hence the indignation of the governor and of the torturers was fiercely levelled against this holy person, so that having exhausted all the usual methods of torture, they at last fixed brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body. These were made red hot for the purpose of scorching him, and yet he remained upright and inflexible, and firm in his confession ; being, no doubt, bedewed and refreshed by the heavenly fountain of the water of life which flows from Christ*. His body witnessed indeed the ghastly tortures which he had sustained, being one

* An illustrious testimony to the doctrine of the Spirit's influences, now so much depreciated, but which was then the support of suffering Christians. The allusion is to St. John, 7th chapter, “ He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And this spake he of the Spirit.”

continued wound and bruise, altogether contracted, and no longer retaining the form of a human creature: In this man the view of Christ suffering wrought great marvels, confounded the adversary, and showed, for the encouragement of the rest, that nothing is to be feared where the love of the Father is; and that nothing is painful where the glory of Christ is exhibited. For, when after some days, the impious had renewed his tortures, and imagined that a fresh application of the same methods of punishment to his wounds, now swollen and inflamed, must either overcome his constancy, or, by dispatching him on the spot, strike a terror into the rest, as he could not even bear to be touched by the hand, this was so far from being the case, that, contrary to all expectation, his body recovered its natural position in the second course of torture; he was restored to his former shape and to the use of his limbs; so that, by the grace of Christ, this cruelty proved not punishment, but a cure.

One of those who had denied Christ was Biblias, a female. Satan, imagining that he had now devoured her, and desirous to augment her condemnation, by inducing her to accuse the Christians falsely, caused her to be led to the torture; and supposing her to be a weak and timorous creature, tempted her to charge us with horrid impieties. But in her torture she recovered herself, and awoke as out of a deep sleep, being admonished, by a temporary punishment, of the danger of eternal fire in hell; and, in opposition to the impious, she said, “How can we eat infants,—we, to whom it is not lawful to eat the blood of beasts*.” And now she professed herself a Christian, and was added to the army of martyrs. The power of Christ,

* Hence it appears that the eating of blood was not practised among the Christians of Lyons; and, that they understood not Christian liberty in this point, will not be wondered at by those who consider the circumstances of the first Christians.

manifested in the patience of his people, had now exhausted the usual artifices of torment ; and the devil was driven to new resources. Christians were thrust into the darkest and most noisome parts of the prison : their feet were distended in a wooden trunk, even to the fifth hole ; and in this situation they suffered all the indignities which diabolical malice could inflict. Hence many of them were suffocated in prison, whom the Lord, showing forth his own glory, was pleased thus to take to himself. The rest, though afflicted to such a degree as to seem scarcely capable of recovery under the kindest treatment, destitute as they were of all help and support, yet remained alive, strengthened by the Lord, and confirmed both in body and mind : and these encouraged and comforted the rest.

Some young persons who had been lately seized, and whose bodies had been unexercised with sufferings, unequal to the severity of the confinement, expired. The blessed Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, upwards of ninety years of age, and very infirm and asthmatic, yet strong in spirit, and panting after martyrdom, was dragged before the tribunal ; his body was worn out indeed with age and disease, yet he retained a soul through which Christ might triumph. Borne by the soldiers to the tribunal, and attended by the magistrates and all the multitude, shouting against him as if he were Christ himself, he made a good confession. Being asked by the governor, who was the God of the Christians, he answered, If ye be worthy, ye shall know. He was then unmercifully dragged about, and suffered variety of ill treatment : those, who were near, insulted him with their hands and feet, without the least respect to his age ; and those at a distance threw at him whatever came to hand : every one looked upon himself as deficient in zeal, if he did not insult him in some way or another. For thus they imagined they revenged the cause of

their gods: He was thrown into prison almost breathless; and after two days expired.

And here appeared a remarkable dispensation of Providence, and the immense compassion of Jesus, rarely exhibited indeed among the brethren, but not foreign to the character of Christ. Many, who, when first apprehended, had denied their Saviour, were notwithstanding shut up in prison and suffered dreadful severities, as this denial of Christ had availed them not. But those, who confessed him, were imprisoned as Christians, abstracted from any other charge. Now the former, as murderers and incestuous wretches, were punished much more than the rest: Besides, the joy of martyrdom supported the latter, and the hope of the promises, and the love of Christ, and the Spirit of the Father. The former were oppressed with the pangs of guilt; so that, while they were dragged along, their very countenances distinguished them from the rest: but the faithful proceeded with cheerful steps: Their countenances shone with much grace and glory: Their bonds were as the most beautiful ornaments, and they themselves looked as brides adorned with their richest array, breathing the fragrance of Christ so much, that some thought they had been literally perfumed. The others went on dejected, spiritless, and forlorn, and in every way disgraced, even insulted by the heathen as cowards and poltroons, and treated as murderers: they had lost the precious, the glorious, the soul-reviving appellation. The rest, observing these things, were confirmed in the faith, confessed without hesitation on their being apprehended, nor admitted the diabolical suggestion for a moment.

The martyrs were put to death in various ways: Or, in other words, they wove a chaplet of various odours and flowers, and presented it to the Father. In truth, it became the wisdom and goodness of God to appoint that his servants, after enduring a great

and variegated contest, should, as victors, receive the great crown of immortality.—Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus, were led to the wild beasts into the amphitheatre, to the common spectacle of Gentile inhumanity.

One day extraordinary of the shows being afforded to the people on our account, Maturus and Sanctus again underwent various tortures in the amphitheatre, as if they had suffered nothing before. Thus were they treated like those wrestlers, who, having conquered several times already, were obliged afresh to contend with other conquerors by fresh lots, till some one was conqueror of the whole number and as such was crowned. * Here they sustained again, as they were led to the amphitheatre, the blows usually inflicted on those who were condemned to wild beasts; they were exposed to be dragged and torn by the beasts, and to all the barbarities which the mad populace with shouts exacted, and above all to the hot iron chair, in which their bodies were roasted, and emitted a disgusting smell. Nor was this all: the persecutors raged still more, if possible, to overcome their patience. But not a word could be extorted from Sanctus, besides what he first had uttered—the word of confession. These then after remaining alive a long time, expired at length, and became a spectacle to the world, equivalent to all the variety usual in the fights of gladiators.

Blandina, suspended from a stake, was exposed as food to the wild beasts; she was seen suspended in the form of a cross, and employed in vehement supplication. The sight inspired the combatants with much alacrity, while they beheld with their bodily eyes, in the person of their sister, the figure of Him

* The allusions to the savage shows, so frequently made in this narrative, point out their frequency in these ferocious times; and give us occasion to reflect on the mild appearances which society has assumed, since even the form of Christianity has prevailed in the world.

who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him, that every one who suffers for the glory of Christ, always has communion with the living God. None of the beasts at that time touched her: she was taken down from the stake, thrown again into prison, and reserved for a future contest; that having overcome in various exercises, she might fully condemn the old serpent, and fire the brethren with a noble spirit of Christian emulation. Weak and contemptible as she might be deemed, yet when clothed with Christ, the mighty and invincible champion, she became victorious over the enemy in a variety of encounters, and was crowned with immortality.

Attalus also was vehemently demanded by the multitude; for he was a person of great reputation among us. He advanced in all the cheerfulness and serenity of a good conscience;—an experienced Christian, and ever ready and active in bearing testimony to the truth. He was led round the amphitheatre, and a tablet was carried before him, inscribed in Latin, “This is Attalus the Christian.” The rage of the people would have had him dispatched immediately; but the governor understanding that he was a Roman, ordered him back to prison: and concerning him and others, who could plead the same privilege of Roman citizenship, he wrote to the emperor, and waited for his instructions.

The interval which this circumstance occasioned was not unfruitful to the Church.—The unbounded compassion of Christ appeared in the patience of many: * Dead members were restored to life by the means of the living; and the martyrs became singularly serviceable to the lapsed; and thus the Church rejoiced to receive her sons returning to her bosom: for by THESE means most of those who had denied Christ were recovered, and dared to profess their Saviour: they felt again the divine life in their

* Dead in their spiritual affections.

souls: they approached to the tribunal; and their God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, being again precious to their souls, they desired a fresh opportunity of being interrogated by the governor.

Cæsar* sent orders that the confessors of Christ should be put to death; and that the apostates from their divine Master should be dismissed.—It was now the general assembly held annually at Lyons, and frequented from all parts; and this was the time when the Christian prisoners were again exposed to the populace. The governor again interrogated. Roman citizens had the privilege of dying by decollation; the rest were exposed to wild beasts; and now it was that our Redeemer was magnified in those who had apostatized. They were interrogated separate from the rest, as persons soon to be dismissed, and made a **CONFESSION TO THE SURPRISE OF THE GENTILES**, and were added to the list of martyrs. A small number still remained in apostasy; but they were those who possessed not the least spark of divine faith, had not the least acquaintance with the riches of Christ in their souls, and had no fear of God before their eyes; whose life had brought reproach on Christianity; and had evidenced them to be the children of perdition†; but all the rest were added to the Church.

During their examination, a man who had lived many years in France, and was generally known for

* It must be confessed, that the power of Stoicism in hardening the heart was never more strongly illustrated than in the case of Marcus Antoninus; thus breaking all the rights of Roman citizenship, and all the feelings of humanity. It puts me in mind of Mr. Pope's lines,

In lazy apathy let Stoics boast
Their virtue fix'd—'tis fix'd as in a frost.

† The difference between true and merely professing Christians is well stated, and deserves to be noticed. A season of persecution separates real believers and real experienced Christians from others, much more visibly than ministers can now do by the most judicious distinctions.

his love of God and zealous regard for divine truth, a person of apostolical endowments, a physician by profession, a Phrygian by nation, and named Alexander, stood near the tribunal, and by his gestures encouraged them to profess the faith. He appeared to all who surrounded the tribunal as one who travailed in much pain on their account. And now the multitude, incensed at the Christian integrity exhibited at the conclusion by the lapsed, made a clamour against Alexander as the cause of this change. Upon which the governor ordered him into his presence, and asked him who he was: He declared that he was a Christian: The former, in great wrath condemned him instantly to the wild beasts;—and the next day he was introduced with Attalus. For the governor, willing to gratify the people, delivered Attalus again to the wild beasts; and these two underwent all the usual methods of torture in the amphitheatre: indeed they sustained a very grievous conflict, and at length expired. Alexander neither groaned nor spake a word, but in his heart conversed with God. Attalus, sitting on the iron chair and being scorched; when the smell issued from him, said to the multitude in Latin, “This indeed which **YE** do is to devour men; but **WE** devour not our fellow-creatures, nor practise any other wickedness.” Being asked what is the name of God, he answered, “God has not a name as men have.”

On the last day of the spectacles, Blandina was again introduced with Ponticus, a youth of fifteen: they had been daily brought in to see the punishment of the rest. They were ordered to swear by the idols; and the mob perceiving them to persevere immoveably, and to treat their menaces with superior contempt, were incensed; and no pity was shown either to the sex of the one or to the tender age of the other. Their tortures were now aggravated by all sorts of methods; and the whole round

barbarities was inflicted ; but menaces and punishments were equally ineffectual. Ponticus, animated by his sister, who was observed by the heathen to strengthen and confirm him, after a magnanimous exertion of patience, yielded up the ghost.

And now the blessed Blandina, last of all, as a generous mother having exhorted her children, and sent them before her victorious to the KING, reviewing the whole series of their sufferings, hastened to undergo the same herself, rejoicing and triumphing in her exit, as if invited to a marriage supper, not going to be exposed to wild beasts. After she had endured stripes, the tearing of the beasts, and the iron chair, she was enclosed in a net, and thrown to a bull ; and having been tossed some time by the animal, and proving quite superior to her pains, through the influence of hope, and the realizing view of the objects of her faith and her fellowship with Christ, she at length breathed out her soul. Even her enemies confessed that no woman among them had ever suffered such and so great things. But their madness against the saints was not yet satiated. For the fierce and savage tribes of men, being instigated by the ferocious enemy of mankind, were not easily softened ; and they now began another peculiar war against the bodies of the saints. That they had been conquered by their patience, produced no stings of remorse : Indeed the feelings of common sense and humanity appear to have been extinguished among them : Disappointment increased their fury : The devil, the governor, and the mob equally showed their malice ; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, “ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still,” as well as ; “ He that is holy, let him be holy still *.” They now exposed to dogs the bodies of those who had been

* Rev. xxii. 11. A striking proof of the sacred regard paid to that divine work—the book of the Revelation,—in the second century.

suffocated in prison, and carefully watched night and day, lest any of our people should by stealth perform the funeral rites. And then exposing what had been left by the wild beasts or by the fire, relics partly torn, and partly scorched, and the heads with the trunks, they preserved them by military guards unburied for several days. Some gnashed on them with their teeth, desirous, if possible, to make them feel still more of their malice. Others laughed and insulted them, praising their own gods, and ascribing their vengeance inflicted on the martyrs to them. All, however, were not of this ferocious mould. Yet even those who were of a gentler spirit, and who sympathized with us, in some degree, upbraided us, often saying,—“Where is your God,—and what profit do ye derive from their religion, which ye valued above life itself*?”

As for ourselves, our sorrow was greatly increased because we were deprived of the melancholy satisfaction of interring our friends. Neither the darkness of the night could befriend us, nor could we prevail by prayers or by price. They watched the bodies with unremitting vigilance, as if to deprive them of sepulchre was to them an object of great importance. The bodies of the martyrs having been contumeliously treated and exposed for six days, were burnt and reduced to ashes, and scattered by the wicked into the Rhone, that not the least particle of them might appear on the earth any more. And they did these things as if they could prevail against God, and prevent their resurrection—and that they might deter others, as they said, from the hope of a future life,—“On which relying they introduce a strange and new religion, and despise the most excruciating tortures, and die with joy. Now let us see if they will

* A diversity of temper or education produced a diversity of conduct among these men, while yet all seem to be equally void of the fear and love of God.

rise again, and if their God can help them and deliver them out of our hands *."

Eusebius observes here, that the reader may judge, by analogy, of the fierceness of this persecution in other parts of the empire, from this detail of the affairs at Lyons; and then adds something from the epistle concerning the humility, meekness, and charity of the martyrs; and this he contrasts with the unrelenting spirit of the Novatians, which afterwards appeared in the Church. "They were such sincere followers of Christ, WHO, THOUGH HE WAS IN THE FORM OF A MAN, THOUGHT IT NOT ROBBERY TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD," that though elevated to such height of glory, and though they had borne witness for Christ not once or twice only, but often, in a variety of sufferings, yet they assumed not the venerable name of martyrs, nor permitted us to address them as such. But if any of us by letter or word gave them the title, they reproved us vehemently. For it was with much pleasure that they gave the appellation in a peculiar sense to Him who is the FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS, the first-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of divine life. And they remembered with respect the deceased martyrs, and said; THEY indeed were martyrs whom Christ hath deigned to receive to himself in their confession, sealing their testimony by their exit, but WE are low and mean professors. With tears they intreated the brethren to pray fervently for them, that they might be perfected.

They exhibited, however, in real facts, the energy of the character of martyrs, and answered with much boldness to the Gentiles: Their magnanimity,

* The natural enmity of the human mind against the things of God was never more strongly exemplified than in this persecution. The folly of thinking to defeat the councils of God appears very conspicuous; and so does the faith and hope of a blessed resurrection,—the peculiarly animating theme of true Christians.

undaunted, calm, and intrepid, was visible to all the world, though the fear of God induced them to refuse the title of martyrs. They humbled themselves under the mighty hand by which they are now exalted *. They were ready to give a modest reason of the hope that was in them before all: They accused none: They took pleasure in commending, none in censuring; and they prayed for their murderers, as Stephen, the accomplished martyr did, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And if HE prayed thus for those who stoned him, how much more ought Christians to pray for the brethren?—They never gloried in an unbecoming way over the lapsed; but, on the contrary, they supplied their weaknesses with maternal tenderness, and shed many tears over them to the Father: they asked life for them, and he gave them it, which they were glad to communicate to their neighbours. Thus in all things they came off victorious before God,—ever cultivating peace,—ever commending peace;—In peace they went to God, leaving neither trouble to their mother the church, nor faction and sedition to the brethren; but joy, peace, unanimity, and charity.

Eusebius has given us another passage also which deserves attention. Alcibiades, one of the martyrs, had led, before the persecution, the life of an ascetic:—he used to subsist only on bread and water. As he continued the same regimen while in confinement, it was revealed in a vision to Attalus, after his first contest in the amphitheatre, that Alcibiades did ill not to use the creatures of God, and that he gave an occasion of scandal to others. Alcibiades was hence induced to change his diet, and to partake of the bounty of God with thanksgiving.—Eusebius tells us also of an epistle directed by these martyrs to Eleutherus, the bishop of Rome,

* 1 Pet. v.



in which they give a very honourable encomium of Irenæus the presbyter. Of him we shall have occasion to speak more hereafter. He was appointed successor to Pothinus ; he outlived the storm, and governed the Church afterwards with much ability and success. The letter to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia, of which Eusebius has given us such large and valuable extracts, furnishes strong proofs of his piety and judgment.

The superstitions, which afterwards arose in so great abundance, and with so much strength : and which, like a dense cloud, so long obscured the light of the Church, seem scarcely to have shaded the glory of those Gallic martyrs in any degree. The case of Alcibiades, and the wholesome check which the divine goodness put to his well-meant austerities, demonstrate that excesses of this nature had not yet gained any remarkable ascendancy in the Church. And the description of the humility and charity of the martyrs shows a spirit much superior to that which we shall have occasion, with regret, to notice in some succeeding annals of martyrdom. In a word, the power of Divine Grace appears little less than apostolical in the church at Lyons. The only disagreeable circumstance in the whole narrative is the too florid and tumid style, peculiar to the Asiatic Greeks ; and which Cicero, in his rhetorical works, so finely contrasts with the attic neatness and purity. In a translation it is scarcely possible to do justice to thoughts extremely evangelical and spiritual, clothed originally in so tawdry a garb. Yet under this great disadvantage a discerning eye will see much of the “unction” of real godliness.—At first sight we must be struck with the difference between primitive scriptural Christianity, and that affectation of rational divinity, which has so remarkably gained the ascendant in Christendom in our times. In the account we have read, the good influence of the Holy Spirit on the

one hand, and the evil influence of Satan on the other, are brought forward every where to our view. In our times both are concealed, or almost annihilated; and little appears but what is merely human. Whether of the two methods is most agreeable to the plan of the sacred writings, must be obvious to every serious and honest enquirer. Christ's kingdom, in the narrative before us, appears truly scriptural and divine: Christian faith, hope, and charity, do their work under the direction of his Spirit: Christians are humble, meek, heavenly-minded, patient, sustained continually with aid invisible; and we see Satan actively, but unsuccessfully, engaged against them. In the degenerate representations of the Christian religion by many moderns, what a different taste and spirit!—Every thing is of this world!—Policy and ambition leave no room for the exhibition of the work of God and the power of the Holy Ghost: The belief of Satanic influence is ridiculed as weak superstition; and natural, unassisted reason, and the self-sufficiency of the human heart, triumph without measure!

CHAP. VII.

THE STATE OF CHRISTIANS UNDER THE REIGNS
OF COMMODUS, PERTINAX, AND JULIAN.—
THE STORY OF PEREGRINUS.

THE reigns of the two last-mentioned emperors, which close the century, are short, and contain no Christian memoirs. That of Commodus is remarkable for the peace granted to the Church of Christ through the world*. The method which Divine Providence used for this purpose is still more so. Marcia, a woman of low rank, was the favourite concubine of this emperor. She had, on some

* Euseb. B. v. c. 19.

account not now understood, a predilection for the Christians, and employed her interest with Commodus in their favour*. He was himself the most vicious and profligate of all mortals, though the son of the grave Marcus Antoninus. Those, who looked at secular objects and moral decorum alone, might regret the change of emperors. In one particular point only, namely, in his conduct towards the Christians, Commodus was more just and equitable than his father. And the power and goodness of God in making even such wretched characters as Commodus and Marcia to stem the torrent of persecution, and to afford a breathing-time of twelve years under the son, after eighteen years of the most cruel sufferings under the father, deserve to be remarked. For certainly the Church of Christ has no communion with debauchees; and though it be abhorrent, also, in its plan and spirit from the systems of proud philosophers, yet it is always friendly to every thing virtuous and laudable in society.—The fact is, It has a taste peculiarly its own: God's ways are not like ours.—The Gospel now flourished abundantly; and many of the nobility of Rome, with their whole families, embraced it. Such a circumstance would naturally excite the envy of the great. The Roman senate felt its dignity defiled by innovations, which to them appeared to the last degree contemptible; and to this malignant source, I think is to be ascribed the only instance of persecution in this reign.

Apollonius, at that time a person renowned for learning and philosophy in Rome, was a sincere Christian; and as such was accused by an informer before Perennis, a magistrate of considerable influence in the reign of Commodus. The law of Antoninus Pius had enacted grievous punishments against the accusers of Christians. One cannot suppose his edict had any force during the reign of Commodus.

* Dion. Cassius.

successor Marcus; but under Commodus it was revived; or rather, a new one, still more severe, was enacted, that the accusers should be put to death*. Perennis sentenced the accuser accordingly, and his legs were broken. Thus far he seems to have complied with the injunctions of the law: in what follows he obeyed the dictates of his own malice, or rather that of the senate. He begged of the prisoner with much earnestness, that he would give an account of his faith before the senate and the court. Apollonius complied, and delivered an apology for Christianity; in consequence of which, by a decree of the senate, he was beheaded. It is not quite easy to account for this procedure. It is perhaps the only trial recorded in history where both the accuser and the accused suffered judicially. Eusebius observes, that the laws were still in force, commanding Christians to be put to death, who had been presented before the tribunal. But Adrian, or certainly Antoninus Pius, had abrogated this iniquitous edict of Trajan. Under Marcus it might be revived,—as what severity against Christians was not to be expected from that cruel persecutor? Now Commodus, by menacing accusers with death, probably supposed he had sufficiently secured the Christians. Yet, if a formal abrogation of the law against Christians did not actually take place, one may see how Apollonius came to suffer as well as his adversary. In truth, if he had been silent, it is very likely he would have saved his own life. Insidious artifices, under the pretence of much respect and desire of information, seem to have drawn him into a measure which cost him so dear:—He died, however, in the best of causes!

There is, in the work of Lucian, a remarkable story of a person named Peregrinus, which, as it falls in with this century, and throws light on the character of the Christians who then lived, deserves

Peregrinu

* Euseb. B. v. c. 19.

to be here introduced. “In his youth,” says this author, “he fell into shameful crimes, for which he was near losing his life in Armenia and Asia. I will not dwell on those crimes; but I am persuaded that what I am about to say is worthy of attention. There is none of you but knows, that being chagrined because his father was still alive, after being upwards of sixty years of age, he strangled him. The rumour of so black a crime being spread abroad, he betrayed his guilt by flight. He wandered about in divers countries to conceal the place of his retreat, till, upon coming into Judea, he learnt the admirable doctrine of the Christians, by conversing with their priests and teachers. In a little time he showed them that they were but children compared to himself: for he became not only a prophet, but the head of their congregation: in a word, he was every thing to them: he explained their books, and composed several tracts himself; insomuch that they spoke of him sometimes as a god, and certainly considered him as a lawgiver and a ruler.—However, these people, in fact, adore that great person who had been crucified in Palestine, as being the first who taught men that religion.—While these things were going on, Peregrinus was apprehended and put in prison on account of his being a Christian. This disgrace loaded him with honour: it was the very thing he ardently desired: it made him more reputable among those of that persuasion, and furnished him with a power of performing wonders. The Christians, grievously afflicted at his confinement, used their utmost efforts to procure him his liberty; and as they saw they could not compass it, they provided abundantly for all his wants, and rendered him all imaginable services. There was seen, by the break of day, at the prison-gate, a company of old women, widows, and orphans, some of whom, after having corrupted the guard with money, passed the night with him.

There they partook together of elegant repasts, and entertained one another with religious discourses. They called that excellent man the New Socrates. There came even Christians, deputed from many cities of Asia, to converse with him, to comfort him, and to bring him supplies of money ; for the care and diligence which the Christians exert in these junctures is incredible : they spare nothing in such cases. They sent, therefore, large sums to Peregrinus ; and his confinement was to him an occasion of amassing great riches ; for these poor creatures are firmly persuaded they shall one day enjoy immortal life ; therefore they despise death with wonderful courage, and offer themselves voluntarily to punishment. Their first lawgiver has put it into their heads that they are all brethren. Since they separated from us, they persevere in rejecting the gods of the Grecians, and in worshipping that deceiver who was crucified : they regulate their manners and conduct by his laws ; they despise, therefore, all earthly possessions, and use them in common. Therefore if any magician or juggler, any cunning fellow, who knows how to make his advantage of opportunity, happens to get into their society, he immediately grows rich ; because it is easy for a man of this sort to abuse the simplicity of these silly people. Peregrinus however was set at liberty by the president of Syria, who was a lover of philosophy and of its professors ; and who, having perceived that this man courted death out of vanity and a fondness for renown, released him, despising him too much to have a desire of inflicting capital punishment on him. Peregrinus returned into his own country, and as some were inclined to prosecute him on account of his parricide, he gave all his wealth to his fellow-citizens, who, being gained by this liberality, imposed silence on his accusers. He left his country a second time in order to travel, reckoning he should

find every thing he wanted in the purses of the Christians, who were punctual in accompanying him wherever he went, and in supplying him with all things in abundance. He subsisted in this manner for a considerable time; but having done something which the Christians abhor,—they saw him, I think, make use of some meats forbidden amongst them,—he was abandoned by them; insomuch that having not any longer the means of support, he would fain have revoked the donation he had made to his country*.”

The native place of this extraordinary man was Parium in Mysia. After his renunciation of Christianity, he assumed the character of a philosopher. In that light he is mentioned by several heathen authors; and this part he acted till the time of his death; when, in his old age, he threw himself into the flames, probably because suicide was honourable in the eyes of the Gentiles, and because Empedocles, a brother philosopher, had thrown himself into the vulcano at mount Ætna.—A remark may here be made on the writer, on the hero, and on the Christians of those times.

It will not be necessary to give an anxious answer to the railleries, cavils and insinuations of Lucian in this narrative. Whoever knows any thing of real Christianity, and the usual obloquy thrown upon it, will easily make just deductions, and separate what is true from what is false. Lucian was one of the most facetious authors of antiquity: He doubtless possessed the talents of wit and satire in a supreme degree. But truth and candour are not usually to be expected from writers of this sort: Lucian, like others of the same vein, had his eyes turned malignantly towards all objects but himself: He was intolerably self-conceited, and may be ranked with

* Lardner's Collect. Vol. ii. c. 19.—Bullet's Establishment of Christianity.

Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and other modern writers of that stamp : He was sarcastic, unfeeling ; and suspicious of evil every where, except in his own heart. The common consequence of such a temper, indulged without restraint, is a sceptical indifference to all sorts of religion, a contempt of every mode of it without distinction, and supercilious self-applause on account of superior discernment. Such men, of all others, seem most to fall under the censure of the wise man, **HE THAT TRUSTETH HIS OWN HEART IS A FOOL.** They take for granted the sincerity, humanity, and benevolence of their own hearts, with as much positiveness as they do the obliquity and hypocrisy of other men's. Antiquity had **ONE** Lucian ; and, it must be confessed the absurdities of paganism afforded him a large field of satire, which, eventually, was not unserviceable to the progress of Christianity : Our times have **ABOUNDED** with writers of this stamp ; and it is one of the most striking characteristics of the depravity of modern taste, that they are so much read and esteemed.

Peregrinus is no very uncommon character. On a less extended scale, men of extreme wickedness in a similar way may frequently be noticed, viz. men, whose early life has been devoted to nothing but vices : Then, afterwards, something of the garb and mode of real Christians is assumed by these deceivers. But it is not every one who has the abilities of Peregrinus to wear the hypocritical garb so assumed with consummate address, and to impose on genuine Christians of undoubted discernment. The unfeeling heart of Lucian appears to rejoice in the impositions of Peregrinus ; and particularly, that he was able to impose on Christians so long and so completely. A philanthropic mind would rather have been tempted to mourn over the depravity of human nature, that it should be capable of such wickedness. Providence, however, often sets a dismal

such men in this life. Peregrinus lived long enough to be proved a complete impostor, and to be rendered intolerable to Christians ; he acted the philosopher afterwards, it seems, a long time : for what is often called philosophy is consistent enough with much hypocrisy ; and HIS dreadful end is awfully instructive to mankind.

Yet, what is there in all this account of the Christians, discoloured as it is by the malignant author, which does not tend to their honour? While Peregrinus made a creditable profession, they received and rejoiced in him : They did not pretend to infallibility. His superior parts and artifice enabled him a long time to deceive. It is probable that he avoided as much as possible the society of the most sagacious and penetrating among the Christians. The followers of Jesus had learnt to spare the mote in their brother's eye, and to feel the beam in their own. They were most solicitously guarded against that species of deception which is the most fatal, namely, the delusion of a man's own heart. If many of them were hence too much exposed to the snares of designing men, the thing tells surely to their honour, rather than to their disgrace. As for the rest ; their liberality their zeal, their compassion, their brotherly love, their fortitude, their heavenly-mindedness, are confessed in all this narrative to have been exceedingly great. I rejoice to hear from the mouth of an enemy such a testimony to the character of Christians: it is one of the best which I can meet with in the second century : Amidst such a dearth of materials it was not to be omitted. In morals, Christians must then have been, at least, much superior to the rest of mankind ; and it is only to be lamented, that he who could relate this story, had not the wisdom to make a profitable use of it for himself.

CHAP. VIII.

SOME ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIAN AUTHORS WHO
FLOURISHED IN THIS CENTURY.

It may throw additional light on the history of Christian doctrine and manners in this century, to give a brief view of Christian authors. Some of the most renowned have been already spoken to, and a few more of great respectability must be deferred to the next century, because they outlived this.

Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, lived under the reign of Marcus Antoninus and his son Commodus. He wrote many epistles to various churches, which demonstrate his care and vigilance in support of Christianity;—a pleasing proof that Corinth was singularly favoured by being possessed of a zealous and charitable pastor; though of his labours there, and of the state of the numerous society of Christians under his ministry, we have no account. He wrote to the Lacedæmonians an instruction concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, and an exhortation to peace and unity. He wrote to the Athenians also; and, by his testimony, he confirms the account before given of their declension after the martyrdom of Publius; and of their revival under the care of Quadratus; and he here informs us that Dionysius the Areopagite was the first bishop of Athens. In his letter to the Christians in Crete, he highly commends Philip the bishop, and guards them against heresies. In his epistle to the churches of Pontus, he directs that all penitents should be received who return to the Church, whatever their past crimes have been, even, if guilty of heresy itself. One may hence infer, that discipline was as yet administered with much strictness in the churches; and that purity of doctrine, as well as of life and manners, were looked on as of high importance, insomuch that some were incli

degree of rigour incompatible with the Gospel, which promises full and free forgiveness through Christ to every returning sinner, without limitations or exceptions. Such inferences concerning the manners and spirit of the Christians at that time seem obvious and natural : The present state of church-discipline among all denominations of Christians in England, would undoubtedly suggest very different reflections.—He writes also to Pinytus, bishop of the Gnoossians in Crete, advising him not to impose on the Christians the heavy burden of the obligation to preserve their virginity, but to have respect to the weakness incident to most of them. It seemed worth while to mention this also as a proof that monastic austerities were beginning to appear in the Church ; and that the best men, after the example of the Apostles, laboured to control them. Pinytus, in his reply, extols Dionysius, and exhorts him to afford his people more solid nourishment ; lest, being always fed with milk, they should remain in a state of infancy. This answer speaks something of the depth of thought and knowledge in godliness, with which Pinytus was endowed.

In his letter to the Romans, directed to Soter their bishop, he recommends to them to continue a charitable custom, which, from their first plantation, they had always practised ; namely,—to send relief to divers Churches throughout the world, and to assist particularly those who were condemned to the mines ;—a strong proof both that the Roman church continued opulent and numerous, and also that they still partook much of the spirit of Christ*.

Theophilus.

Theophilus of Antioch is a person of whom it were to be wished that we had a larger account. He was brought up a Gentile ; was educated in all the knowledge then reputable in the world, and was doubtless a man of considerable parts and learning.

* Euseb. B. iv. c. 23.

His conversion to Christianity seems to have been the most reasonable thing imaginable. The Holy Spirit in his operations ever appears to adapt himself much to different tempers. Theophilus was a reasoner; and the grace of God, while it convinced him of his own inability to clear up his doubts, effectually enlightened his understanding. The belief of a resurrection appears to have been a mighty impediment to his reception of the Gospel: It contradicted his philosophy.—The notions of proud philosophers vary in different ages; but they seldom fail in some form or other to withstand the religion of Jesus.

Of his labours in his bishopric of Antioch we have no account. He carried on a correspondence with a learned man named Autolycus; but with what success we are not told. He appears also to have been very vigilant against fashionable heresies. He lived thirteen years in his bishopric; and died in peace about the second or third year of Commodus*.

Melito, bishop of Sardis, from the very little of his remains that are extant, may be conceived to be one whom God might make use of for the revival of godliness in that drooping church. The very titles of some of his works excite our regret for the loss of them. One of them is on the submission of the senses to faith: another on the soul, the body, and the spirit; another on God incarnate. A fragment of his, preserved by the author of the Chronicle, called the Alexandrian, says, “that the Christians do not adore insensible stones, but that they worship one God alone, who is before all things and in all things, and Jesus Christ who is God before all ages.” He lived under the reign of Marcus Antoninus. His unsuccessful but masterly apology presented to that emperor has already been noticed. He travelled into the east on purpose to collect authentic ecclesiastical information; and he gave a

* Euseb. B. iv. c. 23. and Cave's Life of Theod.

catalogue of the sacred books of the Old Testament. He died and was buried at Sardis ;—a man whom Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, his contemporary, calls an eunuch, that is, one who made himself an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake*. Several such, I apprehend, were in the primitive times. But the depravity of human nature is ever pushing men into extremes. There soon arose some, who made a self-righteous use of these instances of self-denial ; and clogged them with unwarrantable excesses. The contrary extreme is now so prevalent, that,—if a person were to follow the example of Melito on the same generous principles which our Saviour expresses,—it would be thought very extraordinary, and even ridiculous. But, whatever has the sanction of Holy Writ, should be noticed to the honour of those who practise it, whether agreeable to the taste of the age we live in or not, unless we mean to set up the eighteenth century as a sort of Pope to judge the foregoing seventeen.—The same Polycrates observes of him, that his actions were regulated by the motions of the Holy Ghost ; and that he lies interred at Sardis, where he expects the judgment and resurrection.

Bardasanes.

Bardasanes of Mesopotamia, a man renowned for learning and eloquence, escaped not the pollution of the fantastic heresy of Valentinian. His talents and his love of refinement were probably his snare ; but, as we afterwards condemned the fabulous dreams by which he had been infatuated, and as he is allowed to be sound in the main, some relics of his former heresy might be left without materially injuring either his faith or his practice. I know no particular reason for mentioning him at all, but for the sake of introducing a remarkable passage of his writings, preserved by Eusebius†, which shows at

* Matthew, xix. Euseb. B. iv. c. 25. Du Pin and Cave.

† Euseb. Precep. Evang. Jortin's Remarks, iv.

once the great progress and the powerful energy of Christianity.

“In Parthia,” says he, “polygamy is allowed and practised, but the Christians of Parthia practise it not. In Persia the same may be said with respect to incest. In Bactria and in Gaul the rights of matrimony are defiled with impunity. The Christians there act not thus. In truth, wherever THEY reside, they triumph in their practice over the worst of laws and the worst of customs.” This eulogium is not more strong than just.—In what age did human inventions, whether philosophical or religious, produce such fruits as these?

Miltiades was usefully engaged in discriminating the genuine influences of the Holy Spirit from the fictitious,—of which unhappy instances had then appeared. False prophets evinced at first the most stupid ignorance, and afterwards a distempered imagination and furious frenzy. Miltiades showed that the influence of the Holy Spirit described in Scripture, was sober, consistent, reasonable. There is no new thing under the sun: impostures and delusions exist at this day;—and why should it not be thought as reasonable now, as it was then, to discriminate genuine from fictitious or diabolical influences, by laying down the true marks and evidences of each, instead of scornfully treating all alike as enthusiastic? The extraordinary and miraculous influences chiefly come under Miltiades’s inspection; for these were at that time very common in the Christian church; so were delusive pretences also; particularly those of Montanus and of his followers.—Let the discerning reader apply the observations to be made on these and similar facts to our own times.

Apollinarius of Hierapolis wrote several books under the reign of Marcus Antoninus. We have at present only their titles. One of them is Defence of Christianity, dedicated to

Apollina-
rius

The work, of which we know the most from a fragment preserved in Eusebius, is that against the Montanists, which will fall under our observation in the next chapter.

Athena-
goras.

Athenagoras, towards the latter end of this century, wrote an apology for the Christian Religion. His testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity, contained in that work, expresses something beyond a mere speculative belief. This article of the Christian faith appeared to him of essential consequence in practical godliness. He is a writer not mentioned by Eusebius. Du Pin does him injustice by observing that he recommends the worship of angels. I have not access to his apology, but shall give a remarkable quotation from Dr. Waterland, to whom I am obliged for the only valuable information I have of this author*. Speaking of Christians, he describes them as “men that made small account of the present life, but were intent only upon contemplating God and knowing his Word, who is from him,—what union the Son has with the Father, what communion the Father has with the Son, what the Spirit is, and what the union and distinction are of such so united, the Spirit, the Son, and the Father.”

If this be true,—and Athenagoras may well be credited for the fact,—it is not to be wondered at, that the primitive Christians were so anxiously tenacious of this doctrine. It was the climate in which alone Christian fruit could grow. Their speculations were not merely abstracted. They found in the view of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, something of that energy which could raise them from earth to heaven: That is, they found the peculiar truths of the Gospel, which are so closely interwoven with the doctrine of the Trinity. The right use of the doctrine is briefly, but strongly intimated in this

* Epiphanius Heres, 54. 1. See Dr. Waterland's Importance of the doctrine of the Trinity.

passage ; -- and the connexion between Christian principles and practice appears. In truth, a Trinitarian speculatist may be as worldly-minded as any other person. His doctrine, however, contains that which only can make a man fix " his affections on things above."

CHAP. IX.

THE HERESIES AND CONTROVERSIES OF THIS CENTURY REVIEWED, AND AN IDEA OF THE STATE AND PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY DURING THE COURSE OF IT.

My plan calls me not to notice minutely all the heresies which appeared in this century ; but I would not omit them, whenever they may throw light on the work of God's Holy Spirit and the progress of godliness.—On their own account, they deserved not much attention ; yet it was necessary to examine and confute some of them ; and Irenæus acted charitably in so doing. It is, however, to be regretted, that in his celebrated work against heresies, he should be obliged to employ so much time on scenes of nonsense.—Let it be remarked in general, that the same opposition to the Deity of Christ, or his manhood, and the same insidious methods of depreciating or abusing the doctrines of grace, continued in the second century, which had begun in the first, with this difference, that they were now multiplied varied, complicated, and refined by endless subtleties and fancies, in which the poverty of taste and genius, so common in a period when letters are declining, discovers itself no less than the Christian doctrine. Like spots in the sun, however, they vanished and disappeared from time to time ; though revived again in different forms and circumstances. Not one of the heresiarchs of this century was able

to create a strong and permanent interest ; and it is no little proof of the continued goodness and grace of God to his Church, that the sound Christians still kept themselves separate and distinct, and preserved the purity of discipline.

It has often been said, that many have been enlisted among heretics, who were real Christians. When I see a proof of this, I shall take notice of it. But of the heretics in the second century, I fear, in general, no such favourable judgment ought to be passed. The state of Christian affairs, in truth, was such as to afford no probable reason for any real good man to dissent. Where was there more of piety and virtue to be found than among the general society of Christians ? And how could any persons be more exposed to the cross of Christ than they were ?

Heresy respecting the person of Christ.

1. The first set of heretics of this century, were those who opposed or corrupted the doctrines of the person of Christ. A single quotation from Eusebius may be sufficient as a specimen.

Speaking of the books, which were published in these times, he observes*, “ Among them there is found a volume written against the heresy of Artemon, which Paulus of Samosata in our days endeavoured to revive. When this book had confuted the said presumptuous heresy, which maintained Christ to be a mere man, and that this was an ancient opinion ; after many leaves tending to the confutation of this blasphemous falsehood, the author writes thus : “ They affirm that all our ancestors, even the Apostles themselves, were of that opinion, and taught the same with them, and that this their true doctrine was preached and embraced to the time of Victor, the thirteenth bishop of Rome after Peter, and was corrupted by his successor Zephyrinus. This might carry a plausible appearance of

* B. v. c. 25.

truth, were it not, in the first place, contradicted by the Holy Scriptures, and in the next, by the books of several persons, which they published long before the time of Victor, against the Gentiles, in the defence of the truth, and in confutation of the heresies of their times. I mean Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, and Clement, with many others; in all which works Christ is preached and published to be God. Who knoweth not that the works of Irenæus, Melito, and all other Christians, do confess Christ to be both God and Man? In fine, how many psalms, and hymns, and canticles were written from the beginning by faithful Christians, which celebrate Christ, the Word of God, as no other than God indeed? How then is it possible, according to their report, that our ancestors, to the days of Victor, should have preached in that way, when the creed of the Church for so many years is pronounced as certain, and known to all the world? And ought they not to be ashamed to report such falsehoods of Victor, when they know it to be a fact, that this very Victor excommunicated Theodotus, a tanner, the father of this apostasy, who denied the divinity of Christ, because he first affirmed Christ to be only man. If Victor, as they report, had been of their blasphemous sentiments, how could he have excommunicated Theodotus the author of the heresy? ”

Victor's government was about the close of the second century. The anonymous author before us writes most probably in the former part of the third. Nor is his testimony much invalidated by his being anonymous. The facts to which he speaks were notorious and undeniable. We see hence, that all parties, notwithstanding the contempt, which some affect, of the testimony of antiquity and tradition, are glad to avail themselves of it where they can; which is itself a proof of the tacit consent of all

mankind, that this testimony, though by no means decisive, nor such as ought ever to be put in competition with Scripture, yet weighs something, and ought not to be treated with unreserved disdain. In our own days the same attempt has been made in the same cause ; with what probability of success, in the way of sound argument, let the reader, who has considered the passage I have quoted from Eusebius, judge for himself. In fact, it appears that a denial of the Deity of Christ could not find any patron within the pale of the Church for the first two hundred years. The prevalence of sentiments derogatory to the person and offices of Christ was reserved for a later period. Every person of any eminence in the Church for judgment and piety, holds unequivocally an opposite language. In some of the most renowned we have seen it all along in the course of this century.

This Theodotus was a citizen of Byzantium, a tanner, but a man of parts and learning. Heretical perversions of Scripture have often been invented by such persons: Pride and self-conceit seem to have a peculiar ascendancy over men who have acquired knowledge in private by their own industry: And doubtless one of the best advantages of public seminaries is this,—that modesty and reasonable submission are inculcated in them; and men, by seeing and feeling their own inferiority, are taught to think more lowly of their own attainments. This self-taught tanner speculated; felt himself important enough to be singular; and revived the heresy of Ebion. He was brought with some other Christians before persecuting magistrates: His companions honestly confessed Christ, and suffered: He was the only man of the company who denied him. In truth, he had no principles strong enough to induce him to bear the cross of Christ. Theodotus lived still a denier of Christ, and being afterwards upbraided

or denying his God; "No," says he, "I have not denied God, but man; for Christ is no more*." His heresy hence obtained a new name, that of the God-denying apostasy†. Persecution frequently does in this life, in part, what the last day will do completely,—separate wheat from tares!

CEN.
II.

2. The controversy respecting the proper time of the observation of Easter, which had been amicably adjusted between Polycarp of Smyrna and Anicetus of Rome, who had agreed to differ, was unhappily revived towards the close of this century: Synods were held concerning it: and an uniformity was attempted in vain throughout the Church. Victor of Rome, with much arrogance and temerity, as if he had felt the very soul of the future papacy formed in himself, inveighed against the Asiatic churches, and pronounced them excommunicated persons. The firmness, moderation, and charity of one man was of great service in quashing this dangerous contention. Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, rebuked the uncharitable spirit of Victor, reminded him of the union between Polycarp and his predecessor Anicetus, notwithstanding their difference of sentiment and practice in this point, and pressed the strong obligation of Christians to love and unity, though they might differ in smaller matters; and surely a smaller matter of diversity was scarcely ever known to occasion contention.

Controv
sy respe
ing East

The particulars of the debate are not worthy of recital.—Certain fundamentals being stated in the first place, in which all real Christians are united, they may safely be left, each society to follow its private judgment in other things; and,—surely,—yet hold the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But that this was effected with so much difficulty, and that so slight a subject should appear of so great moment at this time, seems no small proof that the

* Damascen. Heres. 54.

† Αρρηθιστος αποστασια.

CHAP.
IX.

power of true godliness had suffered some declension; and was an omen, towards the close of this century, of the decay of the happy effects of the first great Effusion of the Spirit. When faith and love are simple, strong, and eminently active, such subjects of debate are ever known to vanish like mists before the sun.

Heresy of
Montanus.

3. The Church was internally shaken and much disfigured by the heresy of Montanus. This is the account of it given by Apollinaris of Hierapolis, who took pains to confute it*. “Being lately at Ancyra in Galatia, I found the Church throughout filled,—not with prophets, as they call them, but with false prophets; where with the help of the Lord, I disputed publicly for many days against them, so that the Church rejoiced and was confirmed in the truth; and the adversaries were vexed and murmured. It originated in the following manner: There is a village in Mysia, a region of Phrygia, called Ardaba, where we are told that Montanus, a late convert in the time of Gratus, proconsul of Asia, gave advantage to Satan by being elated with ambition. The man behaved in a frantic manner, and pretended to prophesy. Some who heard him, checked him as a lunatic, and forbad his public exhibitions, mindful of our Saviour’s predictions and warnings against false prophets: but others boasted of him as endued with the Holy Ghost, and forgetting the divine admonitions, were so ensnared by his arts as to encourage the imposture. Two women were by Satan possessed of the same spirit, and spake foolish and fanatical things. They gloried in their own supposed superior sanctity and happiness; and were deluded with the most flattering expectations.—Few of the Phrygians were seduced, though they took upon them to revile every Church under heaven which did not pay homage to their pretended inspirations. The faithful

* Euseb. B. C. 14.

throughout Asia in frequent synods examined and condemned the heresy.”

It has ever been one of the greatest trials to men really led by the Spirit of God,—besides the open opposition of the profane,—to be obliged to encounter the subtile devices of Satan, who often raises up pretended illuminations, and so connects them with delusion, folly, wickedness, and self-conceit, that they expose true godliness to the imputation of enthusiasm, and to contempt and disgrace. The marks of distinction are plain to minds which are serious and of tolerable judgment and discretion; but, men, void of the fear of God, will not distinguish. We see here an instance of what has often been repeated from that day to the present in the Church of Christ; and Christians should never fail to do now, what they then did,—namely,—they should examine, expose, condemn, and separate themselves from such delusions: The enthusiasts of every age follow the pattern of Montanus in folly, pride, and uncharitableness: Nothing happens here but what is foretold in Scripture: and in truth, delusions of this sort so generally accompany the real work of God, that wherever that appears, these very seldom fail to appear also.

4. But the eruptions of fanaticism are too wild and unnatural to remain long in any degree of strength. Whatever high pretensions they make to the influences of the Divine Spirit, they are ever unfavourable to them in reality; not only by their unholy tendency during the paroxysm of zeal, but much more so by the effects of contemptuous profaneness and incredulous scepticism which they leave behind them. It is for the sake of these chiefly that Satan seems to invent and support such delusions.—But his grand resource against the Gospel is drawn from contrivances more congenial with the nature of man. Human philosophy after the rudiments of the
and not after Christ, formed the last corrup

this century ; which I shall lay open, to the best of my judgment, from the lights of history. It was toward the close of the century that it made its appearance, nor were the effects of it very great at present : in the next century they appeared very distinctly.

Alexandria was at this time the most renowned seminary of learning. A sort of philosophers there appeared who called themselves Eclectics, because, without tying themselves down to any one set of rules, they chose what they thought most agreeable to truth from different masters and sects. Their pretensions were specious ; and while they preserved the appearance of candour, moderation, and dispassionate inquiry, they administered much fuel to the pride of men leaning to their own understandings. Ammonius Saccas, a famous Alexandrian teacher, seems to have reduced the opinions of this sect to a system. Plato was his principal guide ; but he invented many things of which Plato never dreamed. What his religious profession was is disputed among the learned. Undoubtedly he was educated a Christian ; and, though Porphyry, in his enmity against Christianity, observes that he forsook the Gospel and returned to Gentilism, yet the testimony of Eusebius*, who must have known, seems decisive to the contrary ;—it proves, that he continued a Christian all his days : his tracts on the agreement of Moses and Jesus, and his harmony of the four Gospels, demonstrate that he desired to be considered as a Christian. This man fancied that all religions, vulgar and philosophical, Grecian and barbarous, Jewish and Gentile, meant the same thing at bottom. He undertook by allegorizing and subtilizing various fables and systems, to make up a coalition of all sects and religions ; and, from his labours, continued by his disciples—some of whose works still remain,—his followers

* B. 6. C. 18. Ec. Hist.

were taught to look on Jew, Philosopher, vulgar Pagan, and Christian, as all of the same creed.

Dr. Lardner, in opposition to Mosheim, who seems to have very successfully illustrated this matter, contends that there were no such motley-mixed characters, and that the scheme is chimerical. I have attended closely to Dr. Lardner's own account of this teacher; and also to his review of philosophers in the third and following centuries; and it appears to me, that persons of the class described did actually exist. Ammonius himself seems to have been, if I may be allowed the expression, a Pagan-Christian. That Eusebius and Porphyry should each claim him for their own, is no little proof of his ambiguous character: and I wish we may not have too melancholy proofs of the same thing, when we come to consider the characters of many of the fathers who followed. Longinus, who was of the same school, though more a philologist than a philosopher, in his well-known respectful quotation from Moses, evinces that he was tinctured with a similar spirit. Plotinus is largely and fully in the same scheme. Who knows whether to call Ammianus the historian, and Chalcidius, Christian or Pagan? They affected to be both; or rather pretended that both meant the same thing; and in the fourth and fifth century, though some, with Porphyry, through the virulence of their opposition, were decided enemies of Christ, it is certain that many ambiguous characters abounded among the Christians.

In truth, we see in every age similar scenes. The Gospel in its infancy has to struggle with the open and avowed enmity of all mankind. He, whose decisive power alone can do it, after floods of persecution and a thousand discouragements, gives his religion a settlement in the world too strongly to be overturned, as its enemies hoped at first would be the case. The light of divine truth fails not to

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some impressions on minds by no means converted through it to God. Christianity, though it enforces its truths with much greater clearness than natural religion does; and though it proves its superiority, by exhibiting men who practise accordingly, still has many truths in common with natural religion: Thence ingenious persons are ready to persuade themselves, that their philosophy and the Gospel mean the same in substance: They compliment Christianity with some respectful attention, and yet studiously avoid the cross of Christ, and the precise peculiarities of the Gospel, in order to preserve their credit in the world. We may all have so much noticed this disposition in men, and the number of doubtful characters in consequence, that Mosheim's account cannot, I think, appear difficult of admission.

Undoubtedly the appearance of persons of this sort is a sure symptom that the Gospel is raised to some degree of eminence and stability in the world. In the first century such an ambiguous character would have been a rare phenomenon. Philosophers found no desire to coalesce with a religion contemptible in their eyes in all respects. It was not till numbers gave it some respectability, that a coalition of that kind took place. Seneca would have thought himself sufficiently liberal in not persecuting, but only despising the same religion, which Ammonius, a century afterwards, deigned to incorporate, in pretence at least, with his philosophy.—It has been observed, that the attempt of the court of Charles the First to draw over some of the parliamentary leaders to their interest, was a sure sign of the diminution of regal despotism. Satan beheld the decay of his empire of idolatry and philosophy in the same light; and it behoved him to try the same arts to preserve what remained. Melancholy and disastrous as was the evil we are contemplating, and even more decisively destructive to the progress of vital godliness than any other which had yet appeared, it

was, however, an evidence of the victorious strength of the Gospel, and a confession of weakness on the part of paganism.

In carrying on these arts of seduction, the insidiousness of such middle characters consisted much in expatiating on the truths which lie in common, as of the greatest importance; and in reducing, as far as in them lay, the peculiar truths of the Gospel into oblivion. It was just in this manner, I remember, that * a clergyman speaks in a celebrated sermon preached on the accession of James the Second. While he deals out strains of fulsome adulation on the sovereign, he answers the objection against him drawn from his religion, by observing of what little importance opinions were; and that moral and practical matters were alone worthy of consideration. The conduct of James, in a little time after, showed the weakness of his reasoning: and the effects of this philosophical evil, which, like leaven, soon spread in some faint degree over the whole Church, manifested too plainly that pure and undefiled sentiments of religion are of high importance.

We have hitherto found it no hard matter to discover, in the teachers and writers of Christianity, the vital doctrines of Christ. We shall now perceive that the most precious truths of the Gospel begin to be less attended to, and less brought into view. Even Justin Martyr, before the period of eclectic corruption, by his fondness for Plato adulterated the Gospel in some degree, as we have observed particularly in the article of free-will. Tatian, his scholar, went bolder lengths, and deserved the name of heretic. He dealt largely in the merits of continence and chastity; and these virtues, pushed into extravagant excesses, under the notion of superior purity, became great engines of self-righteousness and superstition; obscured men's views of the faith of Christ, and darkened the whole

* The vicar of Newcastle.

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of Christianity. Under the fostering hand of Ammonius and his followers, this fictitious holiness, disguised under the appearance of eminent sanctity, was formed into a system ; and it soon began to generate the worst of evils. That man is altogether fallen,—that he is to be justified wholly by the faith of Christ,—that his atonement and mediation alone procure us access to God and eternal life,—that holiness is the proper work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man, and that for its production Divine Grace is absolutely necessary ;—these,—and if there be any other similar evangelical truths,—as it was not possible to mix them with Platonism, faded gradually in the Church, and were at length partly denied and partly forgotten *.

St. Paul's caution against philosophy and vain deceit, it appears, was now fatally neglected by the Christians. False humility, "will-worship," curious and proud refinements, bodily austerities mixed with high self-righteous pretensions, ignorance of Christ and of the true life of faith in him, miserably superseded by ceremonies and superstitions,—all these things are divinely delineated in the second chapter to the Colossians ; and, so far as words can do it, the true defence against them is powerfully described and enforced.

Even the cultivation of the human mind, when carried on in the best manner, is apt to be abused by fallen man, to the perversion of the Gospel. Yet I would not place the mathematics and natural philosophy on the same footing as the Platonic or Stoical doctrines. In truth, philosophy is too respectable a name for these last : As they were managed in the school of Ammonius or of Antoninus, they displayed little that deserved the attention

* N. B. The tenth article of our Church is remarkably precise and accurate on this subject. "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of Christ preventing us that we may have a good will, & working with us when we have that good will."

of a wise man : They were either romantic, or absolutely false. The philosophy of the moderns, when applied to abstract quantity, or to the works of nature, is, doubtless, possessed of truth and solidity, yet great care is requisite to keep even modern philosophy within its due bounds ; and to prevent its encroachments on Christianity : and the danger of being elated by pride, and of being made too wise for the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, is common to this with all other sorts of secular knowledge. In regard to what is called moral philosophy and metaphysics, these seem much more nearly allied to the ancient philosophical evils, and have ever been dangerous to religion : fatal mistakes have been made through their means ; and in general, if we except a very small portion of natural truths which are agreeable to the moral sense and conscience of mankind, they appear,—at least,—when conducted, as they have usually been, by un-evangelical persons,—to be the very same sort of mischievous speculation and refinement against which the Apostle to the Colossians speaks. Certainly his cautions against philosophy are equally applicable to THEM ;—for THEY have been found to militate against the vital truths of Christianity, and to corrupt the Gospel in our times as much as the cultivation of the more antient philosophy corrupted it in early ages.—I would here be understood, in both cases, to refer to matter of fact, and not to imaginary suppositions.—In fact, the systems of the moral and metaphysical writers have rarely been founded on Christian principles, and yet they have pretended to incorporate themselves with the Gospel. The effect of such combination must ever prove mischievous, particularly when addressed to the reason of man, prejudiced by self-conceit and the love of sin.

And here we close the view of the second century ; which, for the most part, exhibited proofs of divine

grace as strong, or nearly so, as the first. We have seen the same unshaken and simple faith of Jesus, the same love of God and of the brethren ; and,—that in which they singularly excelled modern Christians,—the same heavenly spirit and victory over the world. But a dark shade is enveloping these divine glories. The Spirit of God is grieved already by the ambitious intrusions of self-righteousness, argumentative refinements, and Pharisaic pride ; and though it be more common to represent the most sensible decay of godliness as commencing a century later, to me it seems already begun. The surviving effects, however, of the first Effusion of the Spirit, and also the effects of some rich additional communications of the same Spirit, will appear in the third century.

CENTURY III.

CHAP. I.

IRENÆUS.

BEFORE we proceed with the orderly course of events in this century, it may be convenient to continue the account of authors who properly belonged to the last, though they survived the conclusion of it. We meet with four celebrated characters of this description; Irenæus, Tertullian, Pantænus, and Clement of Alexandria.

CENT.
III.

Of Irenæus it were to be wished we had a more copious account: The place of his birth is quite uncertain. His name, however, points him out to be a Grecian. His instructors in Christianity were Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, and the renowned Polycarp. The former is generally allowed to have been a man of real sanctity, but of slender capacity. He, as well as Polycarp, had been a disciple of St. John; and with all the imbecility of judgment which is ascribed to him, might, under God, have been of signal service to Irenæus. The instructions of Polycarp, however, seem to have made the deepest impressions on his mind from early life.

The church of Lyons, we have seen, was a daughter of the church of Smyrna, or of the other neighbouring churches. Pothinus, the bishop, must have been a Greek as well as Irenæus; who, as presbyter, assisted the venerable prelate in his old age. After the death of Pothinus, about the year 169, Irenæus succeeded him. Never was any pastor more severely tried by a tempestuous scene. Violent

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I.

persecution without, and subtile heresies within, called for the exertion, at once, of consummate dexterity and of magnanimous resolution. Irenæus was favoured with a large measure of both ; and he weathered out the storm. But heresy proved a more constant enemy than persecution. The multiplication of it, in endless refinements, induced him to write his book against heresies, which must have been at that time a very seasonable work.—His vigour and charity also in settling the insignificant disputes about Easter, as well as his share in writing the account of the martyrdoms of Lyons, have already been mentioned.

The beginning of the third century was marked with the persecution under Septimus Severus, the successor of Julian. Severus himself had, most probably, directed the persecution at Lyons, in which Pothinus suffered ; and when he began to persecute as emperor, he would naturally recall the idea of Lyons, and of the persecution in which he had had so large a share. Gregory of Tours, and the ancient martyrologists inform us, “that after several torments Irenæus was put to death, and together with him almost all the Christians of that populous city, whose numbers could not be reckoned, so that the streets of Lyons flowed with the blood of Christians.” We may easily allow that this is a rhetorical exaggeration. Yet I see no reason with some to deny altogether the truth of this second persecution at Lyons, or of Irenæus suffering martyrdom under it. Gregory of Tours is not the best authority, but there is no circumstance of improbability here. The silence of Eusebius affords no argument to the contrary, because he is far from relating the deaths of all celebrated Christians. Of those in the West particularly, he is by no means copious in his narrative ; and the natural cruelty of Severus, added to his former connexion with Lyons, gives to the fact a strong degree of credibility.

The labours of Irenæus in Gaul were doubtless of the most solid utility. Nor is it a small instance of the humility and charity of this great man,—accurately versed as he was in Grecian literature,—that he took pains to learn the barbarous dialect of Gaul, conformed himself to the rustic manners of an illiterate people, and renounced the politeness and elegant traits of his own country, for the love of souls. Rare fruit of Christian charity! and highly worthy the attention of pastors in an age like this, in which so many undertake to preach Christianity; and yet seem little desirous of distinguishing themselves in what peculiarly belongs to their office!

His book of heresies is nearly the whole of his writings that have escaped the injuries of time. His assiduity and penetration are equally remarkable in analyzing and dissecting all the fanciful schemes, with which heretics had disgraced the Christian name. It is easy to notice that his views of the Gospel are of the same cast as those of Justin *, whom he quotes, and with whose works he appears to have been acquainted. Like him he is silent, or nearly so, on the election of grace; which from the instructors of his early age he must often have heard: And, like him, he defends the Arminian notion of free-will; and by similar arguments †. His philosophy seems to have had its usual influence on the mind,—in darkening some truths of Scripture, and in mixing the doctrine of Christ with human inventions.

There is not much of pathetic, practical, or experimental religion in the work. The plan of the author, which led him to keep up a constant attention to speculative errors, afforded it no opportunities or incitements. Yet, there is every where so serious

* B. 4. C. 14.

† B. 4. C. 72.—Quia in nobis sit, seems equivalent to
ἀντιθέσις.

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and gave a spirit, and now and then such displays of godliness, as show him very capable of writing what might have been singularly useful to the Church in all ages.

He makes a strong use of the argument of tradition in support of the apostolical doctrine against the novel heresies. His acquaintance with primitive Christians justified him in pressing this argument. The force of it, in a certain degree, is obvious, though the papists have perverted his declarations in favour of their own church. But what may not men pervert and abuse? The reasonable use of tradition, as a collateral proof of Christian doctrines, is not hence invalidated. What he observes here concerning the barbarous nations is remarkable *.—“ If there were any doubt concerning the least article,—ought we not to have recourse to the most ancient churches where the Apostles lived? What—if the Apostles had left us no writings whatever? Ought we not to follow the tradition which they left with those to whom they committed the care of the churches? It is what several barbarous nations do, who believe in Jesus without paper or ink, having the doctrine of salvation written on their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and faithfully keeping up to antient tradition concerning one God the Creator and his Son Jesus Christ. Those, who have received this faith without Scripture, are barbarians as to their manner of speaking, compared with us; but as to their sentiments and behaviour, they are very wise and very acceptable to God; and they persevere in the practice of justice and charity. And if any one should preach to them in their language, what the heretics have invented, they would immediately stop their ears and flee afar off, and would not even hear those blasphemies.”

* B. 3. C. 4.— See Fleury's Church History on the subject of the Works of the Fathers, Vol. 1. B. 4.

Thus it appears, that to the illiterate barbarians, tradition, though a poor substitute, supplied the place of the written word. We may not, however, suppose that their faith was blind and implicit. Our author gives a strong testimony to their godliness; and those of them who were taught indeed of God would have in themselves the strongest and most reasonable of all proofs of the divinity of their religion.—This is a valuable evidence of the Holy Spirit's influences, and of the native energy of divine truth on the hearts and lives of very illiterate men.

There is no new thing under the sun :—The artifices of the Valentinians in alluring men to their communion are specimens of the wiles of heretics in all ages.—“ In * public,” says Irenæus, “they use alluring discourses, because of the common Christians, as they call those who wear the Christian name in general; and to entice them to come often, they pretend to preach like us: and they complain that, though their doctrine be the same as ours, we abstain from their communion, and call them heretics. When they have seduced any persons from the faith by their disputes, and made them willing to comply, they then begin to open their heretical mysteries.”

He doubtless agrees with all the primitive Christians in the doctrine of the Trinity: He makes use of the forty-fifth Psalm particularly to prove the Deity of Jesus Christ. He is no less clear and sound in his views of the incarnation †: and, in general, notwithstanding some philosophical adulterations, he certainly maintained all the essentials of the Gospel.

The use of the mystic union between the Godhead and manhood of Christ in the work of redemption; and, in general, the doctrine of the FALL and of the RECOVERY, are scarcely held out more instructively by any writer of antiquity. The learned reader, who

• B. 3. C. 15.

† C. 6. B.

HAP. I. has a taste for what is peculiarly Christian, will not be displeased to see a few quotations *.

“He united man to God: For if man had not overcome the adversary of man, the enemy could not, according to the plan of God’s justice, have been effectually overcome.—And again, if God had not granted salvation, we should not have been put into firm possession of it; and if man had not been united to God, he could not have been a partaker of immortality. It behoved then the Mediator between God and man, by his affinity with both, to bring both into agreement with each other.”

“The † Word of God, all powerful and perfect in righteousness, justly set himself against the apostasy, redeeming his own property from Satan, who had borne rule over us from the beginning, and had insatiably made rapine of what was not his own;—and this redemption was effected not by violence; but the Lord redeemed us with his own blood, and gave his life for our life, and his flesh for our flesh, and so effected our salvation.”

He beautifully expresses our recovery in Christ ‡. “Our Lord would not have gathered together these things to himself, and have saved through himself in the end what had perished in the beginning through Adam, if he had not actually been made flesh and blood. He, therefore, had flesh and blood, not of a kind different from what men have; but he gathered into himself the very original creation of the Father, and sought that which was lost §.”

Undoubtedly the intelligent scriptural reader will recollect the divine reasoning of the author to the Hebrews to be very similar to all this. And those, who see how well the views of Irenæus are supported by him, will know how to judge of the opinions of

* B. 3. 20.

† L. 5. C. 1.

‡ Ανακιφалаίωσις, Eph. i. 10.—See Dr. Owen’s Preface to his “Χριστολογία.”

§ B. 5. C. 14.

those who call this scholastic theology, will see also how accurately the primitive fathers understood and maintained the doctrines now deemed fanatical; and lastly, will observe the propriety of being zealous for Christian peculiarities.—Another short extract shall conclude this account of the book of heresies.

“The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his immense love, became what we are, that he might make us what he is*.”

Of the few fragments of this author, there is nothing that seems to deserve any peculiar attention, except that of an epistle to Florinus, whom he had known in early life, and of whom he had hoped better things than those into which he was afterwards seduced. “These doctrines,” says he, “those who were presbyters before us,—those who had walked with the Apostles, did not deliver to you. For I saw you, when I was a boy, in the lower Asia, with Polycarp; and you were then, though a person of rank in the emperor’s service, very desirous of being approved by him. I choose rather to mention things that happened at that time than facts of a later date. The instructions of our childhood grow with our growth, and adhere to us most closely, so that I can describe the very spot in which Polycarp sat and expounded, and his coming in and going out, and the very manner of his life, and the figure of his body, and the sermons which he preached to the multitude, and how he related to us his converse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord, how he mentioned their particular expressions, and what things he had heard from them of the Lord, and of his miracles and of his doctrine. As Polycarp had received from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, he told us as all things agreeable to the Scriptures. These things, then, through the mercy of God visiting me, I heard with seriousness; I wrote them not on paper, but on my heart.”

CHAP.

I.

ever since, through the grace of God, I retain a genuine remembrance of them, and I can witness before God, that if that blessed apostolical Presbyter had heard some of the doctrines which are now maintained, he would have cried out and stopped his ears, and in his usual manner have said, ‘O good God, to what times hast thou reserved me, that I should endure these things!’ And he would immediately have fled from the place in which he had heard such doctrines.”

How superficially, in this age, which calls itself enlightened, numbers are content to think on religious matters, appears from the satisfaction with which two confused lines of a certain author, great indeed as a poet, but very ill-informed in religion, are constantly quoted ;

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight ;—
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Proud and self-sufficient men, to whom these lines appear full of oracular wisdom, may, if they please, pronounce Irenæus a “graceless zealot.” But those in every age, to whom evangelical truth appears of real importance, will regret that so little of this zeal, “IN EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS,” discovers itself in our times :—They will regret, I say, this want of zeal, because they think it absolutely necessary to preserve practical as well as theoretical Christianity in the world.

CHAP. II.

TERTULLIAN.

CHAP.

II.

WE have not yet had any occasion to take notice of the state of Christianity in the Roman province of Africa. This whole region, once the scene of

Carthaginian greatness, abounded with Christians in the second century, though of the manner of the introduction of the Gospel and of the proceedings of its first planters we have no account. In the latter part of the second, and in the former part of the third century, there flourished at Carthage the famous Tertullian, the first Latin writer of the Church whose works are come down to us. Yet, were it not for some light which he throws on the state of Christianity in his own times, he would scarcely deserve to be distinctly noticed. I have seldom seen so large a collection of tracts, all professedly on Christian subjects, containing so little matter of useful instruction. The very first tract in the volume, namely, that de Pallio, shows the littleness of his views. The dress of the Roman Toga offended him: he exhorted Christians to wear the PALLIUM, a more vulgar and rustic kind of garment, and therefore more becoming their religion. All his writings betray the same sour, monastic, harsh, and severe turn of mind.—“* Touch not, taste not, handle not,” might seem to have been the maxims of his religious conduct. The Apostle Paul, in the chapter alluded to, warns Christians against “will-worship and voluntary humility,” and shows that while the flesh outwardly appears to be humbled, it is inwardly puffed up by these things, and induced to forsake the Head, Christ Jesus. This subtile spirit of self-righteousness may, in all likelihood, in Tertullian’s time, have very much overspread the African church;—otherwise his writings would scarcely have rendered him so celebrated amongst them.

All his religious ideas seem tinged deeply with the same train of thinking: his treatise of Repentance is meagre and dismal throughout; and while it enlarges on outward things, and recommends prostration of our bodies before the priests, is very slight on the essential spirit of repentance itself.

* Coloss. xi.

A Christian soldier, who had refused to wear a crown of laurel which his commander had given him with the rest of his regiment, was punished for the disobedience, and was also blamed by the Christians of those times, because his conduct had a tendency to irritate needlessly the reigning powers. I am apt to think that he might have worn it as innocently as St. Paul committed himself to a ship whose sign was Castor and Pollux. It was a military ornament merely, and could no more be said to have any connexion with idolatry than almost every custom of civil life must have had at that time. The Apostle, I think, would have concurred in disapproving the soldier's want of obedience to his lawful superiors : and he might have referred Christians to his own determination in the case of eating things sacrificed to idols,—"Eat of such things as they set before you, asking no questions for conscience sake." But Tertullian decides on the other side of the question, and applauds the disobedience of the soldier. His reasons are dishonourable to his understanding. He owns that there is no scripture to be found against compliance in this case. Tradition, he thinks, a sufficient reason for contumacy ; and then he proceeds to relate some traditional customs maintained in the African churches, among which the very frequent signing of themselves with the sign of the cross is one.

Superstition, it seems, had made deep inroads into Africa. It was rather an unpolished region ;—certainly much inferior to Italy in point of civilization. Satan's temptations are suited to tempers and situations. But surely it was not by superstitious practices that the glad tidings of salvation had been first introduced into Africa.—There must have been a deep decline.—One of the strongest proofs that the comparative value of the Christian religion in different countries is not to be estimated by their distance from the apostolic age, is deducible from

the times of Tertullian.—If my life be spared, that I may proceed with this History, we shall see Africa exhibit a much more pleasing spectacle.

All this man's casuistical determinations savour of the same asperity. He approved not of flight in persecution,—in direct contradiction to our Saviour's determination *. He takes notice of a martyr named Rutilius; who, having fled several times from place to place to avoid persecution and save himself by money, was suddenly seized, and carried before the Governor, when he thought himself secure. He adds, that having undergone several previous torments, he finished his martyrdom by fire.

I would much rather quote Tertullian as an historian than a reasoner.—We may make useful reflections on this fact, without concerning ourselves with the inferences of the writer.

He disapproved also,—at least after his separation from the Church,—of second marriages, and called them ADULTERY. For as he does not appear to have been much acquainted with the depravity, misery, and imbecility of human nature, most of his precepts carry rather a stoical than a Christian appearance. He was, in his own disposition, doubtless a man of great natural fortitude; and most probably of great strength of body: He lived to an advanced age.—He seems not to have had any thing of that sympathy with the weak and timid, which forms so beautiful a part of the Christian character. The Church in general was not severe enough, according to his ideas of discipline; yet, it must be confessed, they were by no means wanting in that respect. In our licentious times, when sloth and dissipation,—the very opposite extremes to those which pleased the genius of Tertullian,—abound, all, who love the ways of Christ, regret that discipline is at so low an ebb.

The Montanists, whose austerities were

* Matthew, x. 23.

and whose enthusiasm was real, seduced at length our severe African ; and he not only joined them, but wrote in their defence, and treated the body of Christians, from whom he separated, with much contempt.—I have the satisfaction however, as yet, to find that the largest body of Christians, so called, was the soundest.

Tertullian, we are told, resented certain treatment which he met with from some Roman Christians. But of this I know no particulars ; only that an accident of this sort is said to have influenced his secession from the Church. Error, however, is very inconstant : He afterwards left the Montanists either entirely, or nearly so ; and formed a sect of his own, called Tertullianists, who continued in Africa till Augustine's time, by whose labours their existence, as a distinct body, was brought to a close. The character of Tertullian is very strongly delineated by himself in his own writings ; if there had been any thing peculiarly Christian, which he had learnt from the Montanists, his works must have shown it ; but they are all of the same uniformly sable complexion : nor does he seem to have increased in any thing but in severity.

It is but an unpleasing picture which truth has obliged me to draw of this author. One agreeable circumstance, however, attending his history, is this :—It was not on account of any fundamental error in principle, that he left the Church. The faith of Christ, and the practice of real godliness, existed there, beyond doubt, to a much greater degree than amongst the heretics of those times, though it be allowed and hoped, as it ought to be, that some good persons might belong to them. The abilities of Tertullian, as an orator and a scholar, are far from being contemptible ; and have, doubtless, given him a reputation to which he is by no means entitled on account of his theological knowledge. Yet the man

appears always serious and earnest; and, therefore, much more estimable than thousands who would take a pleasure in despising him, while they themselves are covered with profaneness. Nor is it for us, after all, to condemn a person, who certainly honoured Christ, defended several fundamental Christian doctrines, took large pains in supporting what he took to be true religion, and ever meant to serve God. He might even in his latter days, if not before, be favoured with that humbling and transforming knowledge of Christ which would fit him for the enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven.—Superstition and enthusiasm are compatible with real godliness: profaneness is not so.—It were to be wished, that those, who are most concerned in this remark, were more disposed to attend to it than they generally are.

In his treatise against Praxeas, he appears to have had very clear and sound views of the doctrine of the Trinity. He speaks of the Trinity in Unity, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet one God.” He speaks of the Lord Jesus as both God and man, son of man and son of God, and called Jesus Christ. He speaks also of the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He observes, “that this rule of faith had obtained from the beginning of the Gospel, antecedent to any former heretics, much more to Praxeas, who was of yesterday.” To those who know the primitive times I need not say, that Tertullian’s own heresy lessens not the credibility of his testimony to these things.—His Montanism altered not in the least his views of the Trinity.

Tertullian
against
Praxeas.

The heresy of Praxeas consisted in making the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all one and the same: and this notion is no other than what has since been better known by the name of Sabellianism. In this way the distinction of persons in the Godhead is denied; and no doubt the mystery of the Trinity

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removed; but then what becomes of the divine Revelation itself?—All attempts to subvert the faith of Scripture on this subject, labour under the same error, namely, a desire to accommodate divine truths to our narrow reasoning faculties:—let men learn to submit; and on no account attempt to strip the Almighty of his attribute of Incomprehensibility: Tertullian informs us,—that Praxeas first brought this evil from Asia into the Roman world; and that he seduced many; but at last was confuted and silenced by “an instrument* whom God pleased to make use of:—and the evil appeared to be eradicated.” Even Praxeas himself had the ingenuousness to retract his mistake, and his hand-writing still remains among the natural men—so Tertullian calls the Christians in general from whom he had separated;—and he no more revived his heresy. Others revived it afterward, which occasioned the treatise from which I have extracted this brief account.


Tertullian's
Apology.

In his Apology, the eloquence and argumentative powers of our author appear more conspicuous. He refutes, in the usual manner, the stale heathen calumnies of Christians feeding on infants. Their remarkable power over demons he states in the same manner as various of the fathers have done.—As a proof of the unity of the Godhead, he appeals to the consciences of mankind, and to a common practice, even among idolaters, founded on the supposition of ONE GOD. His description is remarkably striking—“What God hath given,” “God sees it,” and “I recommend to God,” and “God will restore to me;” “These,” says he, “are universal modes of speaking and of appealing to the ONE SUPREME. O testimony of the soul, naturally in favour of Christianity!—When men seriously pronounce these words, they look not to the Capitol at Rome, but to Heaven above.

* A modest periphrasis, I apprehend, denoting Tertullian himself.

For the soul knows the seat of the living God, whence it had its own origin."—I scarcely remember a finer observation made by any author in favour both of the natural voice of conscience and of the patriarchal tradition of true religion; for both may fairly be supposed concerned in the support of this practice. It shows how difficult it was for Satan to eradicate entirely every vestige of truth; and every classical reader may observe how common it is for the Pagan writers to speak of God as one, when they are most serious; and instantly to slide into the vulgar polytheism, when they begin to trifle.

This Apology exhibits a beautiful view of the manners and spirit of the Christians of his time; and shows what real Christianity does for men.—The following passages merit particular attention.—“We pray,” says he, “for the safety of the emperors to the eternal God, the true, the living God, whom emperors themselves would desire to be propitious to them above all others who are called gods. We, looking up to heaven, with out-stretched hands because they are harmless, with naked heads because we are not ashamed, without a prompter because we pray from the heart, constantly pray for all emperors, that they may have a long life, a secure empire, a safe palace, strong armies, a faithful senate, a well-moralized people, a quiet state of the world,—whatever Cæsar would wish for himself in his public and private capacity. I cannot solicit these things from any other than from Him from whom, I know, I shall obtain them, because he alone can do these things, and I am he who may expect them of him, being his servant who worship him alone, and am ready to lose my life for his service. Thus then let the claws of wild beasts pierce us, or their feet trample on us, while our hands are stretched out to God: let crosses suspend us, let fires consume us, let swords pierce our breasts,—a praying Christian is in a frame



enduring anything. How is this—ye generous rulers? —Will ye kill the good subject who supplicates God for the emperor? Were we disposed to return evil for evil, it were easy for us to revenge the injuries which we sustain. But God forbid that his people should vindicate themselves by human fire; or be reluctant to endure that by which their sincerity is evinced. Were we disposed to act the part, I will not say, of secret assassins, but of open enemies, should we want forces and numbers? Are there not multitudes of us in every part of the world? It is true we are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your towns, cities, islands, castles, boroughs, counsels, camps, courts, palaces, senate, forum:—**WE LEAVE YOU ONLY YOUR TEMPLES.**—For what war should we not be ready and well prepared, even though unequal in numbers; we, —who die with so much pleasure, were it not that our religion requires us rather to suffer death than to inflict it?—If we were to make a general secession from your dominions, you would be astonished at your solitude.—We are dead to all ideas of worldly honour and dignity: nothing is more foreign to us than political concerns: The whole world is our republic.—We are a body united in one bond of religion, discipline, and hope. We meet in our assemblies for prayer. We are compelled to have recourse to the divine oracles for caution and recollection on all occasions. We nourish our faith by the word of God, we erect our hope, we fix our confidence, we strengthen our discipline, by repeatedly inculcating precepts, exhortations, corrections, and by excommunication, when it is needful. This last, as being in the sight of God, is of great weight; and is a serious warning of the future judgment, if any one behave in so scandalous a manner as to be debarred from holy communion. Those, who preside among us, are elderly persons, not distinguished for opulence, but worthiness of

character. Every one pays something into the public chest once a month, or when he pleases, and according to his ability and inclination ; for there is no compulsion. These gifts are, as it were, the deposits of piety. Hence we relieve and bury the needy, support orphans and decrepit persons, those who have suffered shipwreck, and those who, for the word of God, are condemned to the mines, or imprisonment. This very charity of ours has caused us to be noticed by some ;—See, say they, how these Christians love one another !”

He afterwards takes notice of the extreme readiness with which Christians paid the taxes to the existing government, in opposition to the spirit of fraud and deceit, with which so many acted in these matters. But I must not enlarge ;—the reader may form an idea of the purity, integrity, heavenly-mindedness, and passiveness under injuries, for which the first Christians were so justly renowned. The effect of that glorious effusion of the divine Spirit was the production of this meek and charitable conduct in external things : Every evidence that can be desired is given to evince the truth of this narrative :—The * confession of enemies unites here with the relations of friends.

I shall close the account of Tertullian with a few facts taken from his Address to Scapula, the persecuting governor, without any remarks.

Claudius Herminianus, in Cappadocia, was vexed because his wife was become a servant of Christ, and for that reason he treated the Christians cruelly. —Being eaten with worms, “ Let no one,” says he, “ know it, lest the Christians rejoice.” Afterward, convinced of his error in having, by force of torments, caused persons to abjure Christianity, he died almost a Christian himself.

At Thistrum, Cincius Severus himself taught

* See the foregoing account of Peregrinus, p.

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II.

Christians how to answer so as to obtain the
dismissal.

Asper, having moderately tortured a person and brought him to submit, would not compel him to sacrifice; and he made a public declaration among the advocates, "that he was grieved that he had any thing to do with such a cause."

The emperor Severus himself was, in one part of his life, kind to the Christians. Proculus, a Christian, had cured him of a disorder by the use of a certain oil; and he kept him in his palace to his death. This man was well known to Caracalla, the successor of Severus, whose nurse was a Christian. Even some persons of the highest quality, of both sexes, were openly commended and protected by Severus against the raging populace.

Arrius Antoninus, in Asia, persecuted so vehemently, that all the Christians of the state presented themselves in a body: He ordered a few of them to be put to death, and dismissed the rest, saying, 'you wish to die, wretched men, ye may find yourselves in the hands of executioners and halters.'

CHAP. III.

PANTÆNUS.

CHAP.
III.

ONE of the most respectable cities within the precincts of the Roman empire was Alexandria, metropolis of Egypt. Here the Gospel had been planted by St. Mark; and, from the considerable success which had attended it in most capital towns, it is probable that many persons were converted. But of the first pastors of this Church, and of the work of God among them, we have no account. More distinct information begins with what is known of The Platonic philosophers ruled the taste of the city, which piqued itself on its superior erudition.

Ammonius Saccas had, as we have seen, reduced there the notions of the learned into a system, which pretended to embrace all sorts of sentiments; and his successors, for several ages, followed his plan. We are told, that from St. Mark's time, a Christian catechetical school was supported in Alexandria. Whether it be so or not, Pantænus is the first master of it of whom we have any account. It should seem, from a passage of Eusebius*, that he was a Hebrew by descent. By tradition he had received the true doctrine from Peter, James, John, and Paul; and, no doubt, he deserved this testimony of Eusebius, notwithstanding the unhappy mixture of philosophy which he imbibed in this region. For Pantænus was much addicted to the sect of the Stoics, a sort of romantic pretenders to perfection, which doctrine flattered human pride, but was, surely, ill adapted to our natural imbecility and to scriptural views of innate depravity. The combination of Stoicism with Christianity in the system of Pantænus must have very much debased the sacred truths; and we may be assured that those who were disposed to follow implicitly the dictates of such an instructor, must have been furnished by him with a clouded light of the Gospel;—still, it is not improbable but that many of the simple and illiterate Christians might happily escape the infection, and preserve, unadulterated, the genuine simplicity of the faith of Christ:—The bait of reasoning pride lies more in the way of the learned; and, in all ages, they are more prone to be caught by it.

Pantænus always retained the title of The Stoic Philosopher, after he had been admitted to eminent employments in the Christian church†. For ten years he laboriously discharged the office of Catechist, and freely taught all that desired him: whereas the school of his predecessors had been more private.

* B. 5. C. 10.

† Cave's Life of Pantænus

Certain Indian ambassadors,—it is not easy to determine from what part of India they came,—intreated Demetrius, then bishop of Alexandria, to send them some worthy person to preach the faith of Jesus in their country. Pantænus was chosen; and the hardships he must have endured, were, doubtless, great. But there were at that time* many Evangelists, who had the apostolical spirit to propagate the faith at the hazard of their lives. And, as Pantænus very freely complied with this call, we have here one of the best proofs of his being possessed of the spirit of the Gospel. His labours among ignorant Indians, were neither fame, nor ease, nor profit, were attainable, appear to me much more substantial proofs of his godliness, than any which can be drawn from his catechetical employments at Alexandria. The former would oblige him to attend chiefly to Christian fundamentals, and could afford little opportunity of indulging the philosophic spirit. We are told he found in India the Gospel of St. Matthew, which had been carried thither by the Apostle Bartholomew, who had first preached amongst them.—I mention this, but much doubt the truth of it.—Of the particular success of his labours we have no account: He lived to return to Alexandria, and resumed his catechetical office. He died not long after the commencement of the third century. He wrote but little: Some commentaries on the Scriptures are all that are mentioned as his, and of them not a fragment remains.

Candour, I think, requires us to look on him as a sincere Christian,—whose fruitfulness was yet much checked by that very philosophy for which Eusebius so highly commends him.—A blasting wind it surely was; but it did not entirely destroy Christian vegetation in all whom it infected.—Let us now turn our eyes to his disciple, from whom we may collect more clearly what the master was, because

* Euseb. B. 5. C. 9.

we have more evidence concerning him.—But the Christian reader must be prepared to expect a declension in divine things, in the state of the Church before us.

CHAP. IV.

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS.

HE was, by his own confession, a scholar of Panteus, and of the same philosophical cast of mind. He was of the eclectic sect. It is sincerely to be regretted that Clemens had any acquaintance with them: for so far as he mixed their notions with Christianity, so far he tarnished it: and though we may admit, that by his zeal, activity, learning, and reputation, he did good to many in instructing and inducing them to receive the fundamentals of the divine religion, it is nevertheless not to be denied that he clouded the pure light of the Gospel:—Let us hear himself: “* I espouse neither this nor that philosophy, neither the Stoic nor the Platonic, nor the Epicurean, nor that of Aristotle; but whatever any of these sects have said, that is fit and just; whatever teaches righteousness with a divine and religious knowledge, all this I select; and call it philosophy.”

Is it not hence very evident, that from the time that this philosophizing spirit had entered into the Church through Justin, it had procured to itself a respect to which its merits no way entitled it? For what is there even of good ethics in all the philosophers, which Clemens might not have learnt in the New Testament: and much more perfectly, and without the danger of pernicious adulterations?

* Strom. L. i. See Cave's Life of Clemens.

Doubtless many valuable purposes are answered by an acquaintance with these writers ;—but to dictate to us in religion, Clemens should have known, was no part of THEIR business.—“The world by wisdom knew not God ;”—“Beware of philosophy.” The Christian world was now gradually learning to neglect these Scriptural cautions, and divine knowledge is certainly much too high a term for any human doctrine whatever.

He succeeded his master Pantænus in the catechetical school, and under him were bred the famous Origen, Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, and other eminent men. I read the following passage of Clemens with no pleasure,—“As the husbandman first waters the soil, and then casts in his seed, so the notions which I derive out of the writings of the Gentiles serve first to water and soften the earthy parts of the soul, that the spiritual seed may be the better cast in, and take vital root in the minds of men.”

This, certainly, is not a Christian dialect : The Apostles neither placed Gentile philosophy in the foundation, nor believed that it would at all assist in raising the superstructure of Christianity. On the contrary, they looked on the philosophical religion of their own times as so much rubbish ; but, in all ages, the blandishments of mere reason on such subjects deceive us ;—“VAIN MAN WOULD BE WISE.”

Besides his employments in the office of Catechist, he was made Presbyter in the Church of Alexandria. During the persecution under Severus, most probably, he visited the East, and had a peculiar intimacy with Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, who seems to have been a holy man. This last suffered imprisonment for the faith ; and in that situation he wrote a letter to the Church of Antioch, which was conveyed by Clemens. Something of the spirit of Christianity

appears in the fragment of this letter. “ Alexander, a servant of God, and a prisoner of Jesus Christ, to the blessed Church at Antioch, in the Lord, greeting. Our Lord has made my bonds, in this time of my imprisonment, light and easy to me ; while I understood that Asclepiades, a person admirably qualified by his eminency in the faith, was, by divine providence, become bishop of your holy Church of Antioch. These letters, brethren, I have sent you by Clemens the blessed Presbyter, a man of approved integrity, whom ye both do know already and shall still further know : He hath been here with us according to the good will of God, and hath much established and augmented the Church of Christ.” From Jerusalem Clemens went to Antioch, and afterwards returned to his charge at Alexandria. —The time of his death is uncertain.

The mystic philosophy, to which he was so much addicted, would naturally darken his views of some of the most precious truths of the Gospel. In particular, the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ will always suffer from a connexion of this kind : Human philosophical doctrines admit no righteousness but what is a man’s own.—There is, notwithstanding, good proof of the solid piety of this learned man. Little is known of his life ; but his religious taste and spirit may be collected from his writings.

His Exhortations* to the Gentiles is a discourse written to convert the Pagans from their religion, and persuade them to embrace that of Jesus Christ. In the beginning of it he shows what a difference there is between the design of Jesus Christ, and that of Orpheus, and of those ancient musicians who were the authors of idolatry. “ These captivated men by the sweetness of their music with a view of rendering them miserable slaves to idols ; and of making them like the very beasts, the stocks, the

* Du Pin Clement.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH:

stones, which they adored ;—whereas Jesus Christ, who, from all eternity, was the Word of God, always had a compassionate tenderness for men, and at last took their nature upon him, to free them from the slavery of Demons, to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, to guide their paths in the way of righteousness, to deliver them from death and hell, and to bestow on them everlasting life, and to put them into a capacity of living a heavenly life here upon earth ; and, lastly, God made himself man to teach man to be like unto God.” He shows them, that eternal salvation cannot otherwise be expected, and that eternal torments cannot otherwise be avoided, than by believing in Jesus Christ, and by living conformably to his laws. “ If you were permitted,” says he, “ to purchase eternal salvation, what would you not give for it? And now you may obtain it by faith and love ;—there is nothing can hinder you from acquiring it ;—neither poverty, nor misery, nor old age, nor any state of life. Believe, therefore, in one God, who is God and man, and receive eternal salvation for a recompence.—Seek God, and ye shall live for ever.”

The candid Christian sees that the fundamentals of the Gospel are actually here, though not laid down in the clearest and happiest manner. * In his Pædagogue he describes the WORD INCARNATE as the instructor of men ; and says, “ that he performs his functions by forgiving our sins as he is God, and by instructing us as he is man, with great sweetness and love :—He equally instructs all sorts, because, in one sense, all are children : yet we must not look on Christian doctrines as childish and contemptible : on the contrary, the quality of CHILDREN— which we receive in baptism †—or regeneration—

* Du Pin.

† The outward sign and the inward spiritual grace, on account of their usual connexion in the primitive church, are used as synonymous by a number of primitive writers, which

—renders us perfect in the knowledge of divine things, by delivering us from sins through grace, and by enlightening us with the illumination of faith ; so that we are at the same time both children and men ; and the milk with which we are nourished, being both the word and will of God, is very solid and substantial nourishment.” These appear to be some of his best ideas of Christianity.

In his *Stromata* he speaks with his usual partiality in favour of philosophy, and shows the effect which his regard for it had on his own mind, by saying that faith is God’s gift, but so as to depend on our own free-will. His account of the perfect Christian, whom he calls Gnosticus, is sullied by stoical rhapsodies *.—“ He is never angry, and nothing affects him ; because he always loves God : He looks upon that time as lost which he is obliged to spend in receiving nourishment : He is employed in continual and mental prayer. He is mild, affable, patient, but at the same time so rigid as not to be tempted : He gives way neither to pleasure nor to pain.”

*Stromata of
Clemens.*

But enough of these views : Pseudo-religionists have since his time dealt largely in such reveries, so inconsistent with that humbling sense of imbecility, and that sincere conflict against the sin of our nature, which is peculiarly Christian. In truth—if his knowledge of Christian doctrine was really defective, the defect lay in his view of original sin. Of this his philosophical sect knew nothing aright ; and it must be owned he speaks of it in a very confused, if not in a contradictory manner. On the whole,—such is the baneful effect of mixing things which will not incorporate,—human inventions with Christian truths,—that this writer, learned, laborious, and ingenious as he was, may seem to be far ex-

has, unhappily, given occasion to one of the worst abuses, by those who place all grace in form and ceremony only.

* Fleury, B. 4.

ceeded by many obscure and illiterate persons at this day, in true Scriptural knowledge and in the experience of divine things.—That he was, in the main, a truly pious person, neither makes this account less credible, nor the danger less of admitting the pestilent spirit of human self-sufficiency to dictate in the Christian religion.

CHAP. V.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH DURING THE REIGNS OF SEVERUS AND CARACALLA.

CHAP.
V.

It seemed proper to prefix to the general history of the third century, the lives of the four persons, which we have reviewed; partly because they were studious men not very much connected with the public state of Christianity; and partly because the knowledge of their views and taste in religion may prepare the reader to expect that unhappy mixture of philosophical self-righteousness and superstition, which much clouded and depraved the pure light of the Gospel in this century.

The 5th
Persecu-
tion of the
Christians.

By Severus
A. D.
202.

Severus, though in his younger days a bitter persecutor of Christians at Lyons, was yet, through the influence of the kindness which he had received from Proculus, favourably disposed toward the Christians for a considerable time. It was not till about the tenth year of his reign, which falls in with the year two hundred and two, that his native ferocity of temper brake out afresh, and kindled a very severe persecution against the Christians. He was just returned from the East victorious: and the pride of prosperity induced him to forbid the propagation of the Gospel. Christians still thought it right to obey God rather than man. Severus persisted; and exercised the usual cruelties. The persecution raged every where; but particularly at Alexandria. From

various parts of Egypt the Christians were brought thither to suffer; and they expired in torments. Leonidas, father of the famous Origen, was beheaded; so easy a death however was esteemed a favour. His son was then very young; but the account, which is given of him by Eusebius*, deserves our notice.

Account of
Origen.

Lætus was at that time governor of Alexandria and of the rest of Egypt; and Demetrius had been recently elected bishop of the Christians in that city. Great numbers now suffering martyrdom, young Origen panted for the honour, and needlessly exposed himself to danger. His mother checked the imprudent zeal at first by earnest entreaties; but perceiving that he still was bent on suffering with his father, who at that time was closely confined, she very properly exercised her motherly authority by confining him to the house, and by hiding from him all his apparel. The vehement spirit of Origen prompted him, when he could do nothing else, to write a letter to his father, in which he thus exhorted him, "Father, faint not, and don't be concerned on our account." He had been carefully trained in the study of the Scriptures under the inspection of his pious father, who, together with the study of the liberal arts, had particularly superintended this most important part of education. Before he introduced his son to any material exercises in profane learning, he instructed him in the Scriptures, and gave him daily a certain task out of them to repeat. The penetrating genius of Origen led him, in the course of his employment, to investigate the sense of Scripture, and to ask his father questions beyond his ability to solve. The father checked his curiosity, reminded him of his imbecility, and admonished him to be content with the plain grammatical sense of Scripture, which obviously offered itself;—but inwardly rejoiced, it

* Euseb. B. vi. C 1.



seems, that God had given him such a son. And it would not have been amiss, if he had rejoiced WITH TREMBLING;—perhaps he did so; and Origen's early loss of such a father, who, probably, was more simple in Christian faith and piety than he himself ever was, might be an extreme disadvantage to him. Youths of great and uncommon parts, accompanied, as is generally the case, with much ambition and boundless curiosity, have often been the instruments of Satan in perverting divine truth: and it is not so much attended to as it ought to be by many truly pious and humble souls, that the superior eminence, in parts and good sense, of young persons whom they love and respect, is by no means a prognostic of the like superiority in real spiritual knowledge and the discernment of divine things. Men of genius, if they meet with encouragement, will be sure to distinguish themselves in whatever line of life they move. But men of genius and even of very remarkable endowments, though sincere in Christianity, may, not only in the practice, but even in the perception of Gospel-truths, be far out-stripped by others who are naturally much their inferiors; because the latter are by no means so exposed to the crafts of Satan, are not so liable in their judgments to be warped from Christian simplicity, are more apt to look for understanding from above, and are less disposed to lean to an arm of flesh.

We seem to discover, in the very beginning of Origen, the foundation of that presumptuous spirit which led him afterwards to philosophize so dangerously in the Christian religion, and never to content himself with plain truth, but to hunt after something singular and extraordinary;—though it must be acknowledged his sincere desire of serving God appeared from early life; nor does it ever seem to have forsaken him, so that he may be considered as having been a child of God from early years.

His father dying a martyr, he was left, with his mother and other six children, an orphan aged seventeen years. His father's substance was confiscated by the emperor, and the family reduced to great distress. But Providence gave him a friend in a rich and godly matron, who yet supported in her house a certain person of Antioch, that was noted for heresy. We cannot at this distance of time assign her motives; but Origen, though obliged to be in the company of the heretic, could not be prevailed on to join in prayer with him. He now vigorously applied himself to the improvement of his understanding; and having no more work at school,—it seems, because he soon acquired all the learning his master could give him,—and finding that the business of catechising was deserted at Alexandria because of the persecution, he undertook the work himself; and several Gentiles came to hear him and became his disciples. He was now in the eighteenth year of his age; and in the heat of the persecution he distinguished himself by his attachment to the martyrs, not only to those of his acquaintance, but in general to all who suffered for Christianity. He visited such of them as were fettered in deep dungeons and close imprisonment; and was present with them even after their condemnation, and boldly attended them to the place of execution: he openly embraced and saluted them; and was once in imminent danger of being stoned to death on this account. Indeed he was repeatedly in peril of his life; for the persecution daily prevailed; and he could no longer pass safely through the streets of Alexandria. He often changed his lodgings, but was every where pursued; and, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible for him to escape. His instructions, however, and his zeal produced great effects; multitudes crowded to hear him; and were by his labours incited to attend to Christianity.

The charge of the school was now, by  as

the bishop, committed to him alone; and he converted it wholly into a school of religious information: He maintained himself by the sale of the profane books which he had been wont to study. Thus he lived many years, an amazing monument, at once both of industry and of self-denial. Not only the day, but the greater part of the night, was by him devoted to religious study; and he practised, with literal conscientiousness, our Lord's rules, of not having two coats, nor two pairs of shoes, and of not providing for futurity. He was inured to cold, nakedness, and poverty: He offended many by his unwillingness to receive their gratuities: He abstained from wine; and in general, lived so abstemiously as to endanger his life. Many persons imitated his excessive austerities: and were, at that time, honoured with the name of philosophers; and some of them patiently suffered martyrdom.

I state facts as I find them.—A strong spirit of self-righteousness, meeting with a secret ambition, too subtile to be perceived by him who is the dupe of it, and supported by a natural fortitude of mind, and by the active exertion of great talents, hath enabled many in external things to seem superior in piety to men of real humility and self-diffidence, who penetrating more happily into the genius of the Gospel, by the exercise of faith in the Son of God, and that genuine charity which is its fruit, are led into a course of conduct less dazzling indeed, but much more agreeable to the Gospel. One cannot form a high idea of the solid judgment of these Alexandrian converts. Were there none of the elder and more experienced Christians in that city, who were capable, with meekness of wisdom, of correcting the exuberances of this zealous youth, and of showing him that, by such a refusal of the comforts of life, he affected a superiority to Paul himself, who gratefully received the alms of the Philippians? Excesses of this sort must have been attended

with great defects in inward vital godliness: The reader is again referred to the second chapter of the epistle to the Colossians, for a comment on the conduct of Origen. How much better had it been for him to have continued a scholar for some time longer; and not to have feasted the pride of the human heart by appointing him a teacher!—But the lively flow of genius seems to have been mistaken for great growth in Christian knowledge and piety.

One of his scholars, called Plutarch, was led to martyrdom. Origen accompanied him to the place of execution. The odium of the scholar's sufferings reflected on the master; and it was not without a peculiar providence that he escaped the vengeance of the citizens. After him Serenus suffered by fire: the third martyr was Heraclides; the fourth Heron. The former had not yet been baptized, being only what was called a Catechumen: the latter had been lately baptized; but both were beheaded. A second Serenus of the same school, having sustained great torments and much pain, was beheaded. A woman also, called Rais, as yet a Catechumen, suffered death. Potamiæna, a young woman remarkable for beauty, purity of mind, and firmness in the faith of Christ, suffered very dreadful torments: She was scourged very severely by the order of Aquila the judge, who threatened to deliver her to be abused by the basest characters. But she remained firm in the faith: was led to the fire, and burned together with her mother Marcella. The heart of Basilides, a soldier, who presided at her execution, was softened. He pitied her, treated her courteously, and protected her, so far as he durst, from the insolence of the mob. She acknowledged his kindness, thanked him, and promised that after her departure she would entreat the Lord for him. Scalding pitch was poured on her whole body, which she sustained in much patience. Some time after, Basilides, being required by his fellow-soldiers to swear profanely

Martyr-
doms.

occasion, he refused, and confessed himself a Christian. They disbelieved him at first; but finding him serious, they carried him before the judge, who remanded him to prison. The Christians visited him; and upon being questioned as to the cause of his sudden change, he declared that Potamiæna, three days after her martyrdom, had appeared to him by night, and informed him that she had performed her promise; and that he should shortly die.—After this he suffered martyrdom.

The reader will think this an extraordinary story: It is tinged with superstition, no doubt; but who can venture, without meriting the imputation of temerity, to reject it altogether as a fiction? Eusebius lived at no great distance from the time of Origen: He had made accurate inquiries after him and his followers in Alexandria; and he observes that the fame of Potamiæna was in his own time very great in that province. Her martyrdom and that of the soldier seem sufficiently authentic. Her promise to pray for him after her departure only shows the gradual prevalence of fanatical philosophy, will-worship, and the like; and if the reader be not prepared by a sufficient degree of candour to admit the truth of authentic narratives and the reality of converting grace, because pitiably stained, in many instances, with such superstition, he will find little satisfaction in the evidences of Christian piety for many ages. But we are slaves to habit. In our own time we make great allowances in Christians for the love of the world: we are not so easily disposed to make allowances for superstitions. Yet many wrong sentiments and views may be found where the heart is devoted, in faith and love, to God and his Christ. It will still be objected, that God would not sanctify superstitions of this sort, by causing supernaturally the deceased spirit of a martyr to appear to Basilides. —I answer,—the supposition of a dream removes all the difficulty; and the more

easily, when we recollect that the man's mind could not fail to have been previously under a strong impression of the person of the sufferer, of her late martyrdom, and of the circumstances which attended it.

A peculiar resolution made and put into execution about this time by Origen illustrates his character in the strongest manner. Though disposed beyond most men to allegorize the Scriptures, in one passage he followed their literal sense too closely. "There are some who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*."—We need not be at a loss for his motives. He was much conversant among women as a catechiser and an expounder of the Scriptures;—and, no doubt, he was desirous of removing occasions for the slanders of infidels, as well as temptations from himself.—However he took all possible pains to conceal the fact.

One cannot but be astonished in noticing how strong the self-righteous maxims and views were grown in the Church;—yet still,—piety of principle, combined with fervour of zeal, must be revered by every one, who is not lost to all sense of goodness.—The extraordinary step taken by Origen, above alluded to, could not remain a secret. Demetrius, his bishop, at first encouraged and commended him: afterward †, through the power of envy, on account of his growing popularity, he published the fact abroad with a view to asperse him. However, the bishops of Cæsarea and Jerusalem protected and supported him, and ordained him a presbyter in the church. Day and night he continued still to labour at Alexandria.—But it is time to turn from Alexandria to other parts of the Roman empire; and to see what effects were produced by this same persecution of Severus.

Alexander, a bishop in Cappadocia, confessed the faith of Christ, and sustained a variety of sufferings;

* Matthew, xix. 12.

† Euseb. B. vi. C. 7.

and yet by the providence of God was at length delivered :—and he travelled afterwards to Jerusalem. There he was joyfully received by Narcissus the very aged bishop of that see, a man of extraordinary piety, who associated Alexander with him in the labours of Christian instruction. Some epistles of the latter were extant in Eusebius's time, which gives us a short fragment of one of them, sufficiently authenticating the fact,—that those two holy men were joint pastors of Jerusalem.

“ Narcissus greets you, who governed this bishopric before me : and now being an hundred and sixteen years old, prayeth with me, and that very seriously, for the state of the church, and beseecheth you to be of one mind with me.”

If the ancient martyrologies had been preserved uncorrupted, they would, doubtless, afford us useful materials, and illustrate much the spirit and genius of real Christianity in its primitive professors. But frauds, interpolations, and impostures, are endless. The papal and monastic superstitions, in after-ages induced their supporters to corrupt these martyrologies, and indeed the writings of the fathers in general. The difficulty of procuring materials for a well-connected credible history of real Christians, is hence increased exceedingly. What I cannot believe, shall not take the trouble to transcribe ; what I can where the matter appears worthy of memory, shall be exhibited. This is the case of the martyrs of Scillita, a city of Africa, in the province of Carthage. The narration is simple, credible throughout, and worthy of the purest ages of the Gospel.—The fact belongs to the times of Severus.

“ Twelve persons were brought before Saturninus the proconsul at Carthage, the chief of whom were Speratus, Narzal, and Cittin ; and three women Donata, Secunda and Vestina. When they came before him, he said to them all, “ You may expect the emperor our master's pardon, if you return to

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your senses, and observe the ceremonies of our gods." To which Speratus replied, "We have never been guilty of any thing that is evil, nor been partakers of injustice: We have even prayed for those who persecute us unjustly; in which we obey our EMPEROR, who prescribed to us this rule of behaviour." Saturninus answered, "We have also a religion that is simple: We swear by the genius of the emperors, and we offer up vows for their health, which you ought also to do." Speratus answered, "If you will hear me patiently, I will declare unto you the mystery of Christian simplicity." The proconsul said, "Shall I hear you speak ill of our ceremonies? Rather swear, all of you, by the genius of the emperors our masters, that you may enjoy the pleasures of life." Speratus answered, "I know not the genius of the emperors. I serve God, who is in heaven, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. I have never been guilty of any crime punishable by the public laws: if I buy any thing, I pay the duties to the collectors: I acknowledge my God and Saviour to be the Supreme Governor of all nations: I have made no complaints against any person; and therefore they ought to make none against me." The proconsul, turning to the rest, said, "Do not ye imitate the folly of this mad wretch; but rather fear our prince and obey his commands." Cittin answered, "We fear only the Lord our God, who is in heaven." The proconsul then said,—“Let them be carried to prison, and put in fetters till to-morrow.”

The next day the proconsul, seated on his tribunal, caused them to be brought before him, and said to the women,—“Honour our prince, and do sacrifice to the gods,” Donata replied, “We honour Cæsar as Cæsar; but to God we offer prayer and worship.” Vestina said, “I also am a Christian.” Secunda said, “I also believe in my God, and will continue steadfast to him; and, in regard to

your gods, we will not serve and adore them." The proconsul ordered them to be separated; then, having called for the men, he said to Speratus, "Perseverest thou in being a Christian?" Speratus answered, "Yes, I do persevere:—Let all give ear, I am a Christian;" which being heard by the rest, they said, "We also are Christians." The proconsul said, "You will neither consider your danger, nor receive mercy." They replied, "Do what you please, we shall die joyfully for the sake of Jesus Christ." The proconsul asked, "What books are those which you read and revere?" Speratus replied, "The four Gospels of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the Epistles of the Apostle St. Paul, and all the Scripture that is inspired of God." The proconsul said, "I will give you three days to reflect and to come to yourselves." Upon which Speratus answered, "I am a Christian, and such are all those who are with me: and we will never quit the faith of our Lord Jesus. Do, therefore, what you think fit."

The proconsul, seeing their resolution, pronounced sentence against them,—that they should die by the hands of the executioner, in these terms:—"Speratus and the rest, having acknowledged themselves to be Christians, and having refused to pay due honour to the emperor, I command their heads to be cut off." This sentence having been read, Speratus and his fellow-sufferers said, "We give thanks to God, who honoureth us this day with being received as martyrs in heaven, for confessing his name." They were carried to the place of punishment, where they fell on their knees all together, and having again given thanks to Jesus Christ, they were beheaded*.

† At Carthage itself four young Catechumens were seized, Revocatus and Felicitas,—slaves to the same master,—with Saturninus and Secundulus; and also Vivia Perpetua, a lady of quality. She

* Henry, B. 5. p. 77.

† Acta sincera, p. 86.

had a father, a mother, and two brothers, of whom one was a catechumen: she was about twenty-two years of age; was married, and was then pregnant; and moreover, she had a young child at her breast. To these five, by an excess of zeal too common at that time, Satur, voluntarily, joined himself. While they were in the hands of the persecutors, the father of Perpetua, himself a Pagan, but full of affection to his favourite offspring, importuned her to fall from the faith. His intreaties were vain. Her pious constancy appeared to him an absurd obstinacy, and enraged him so much as to induce him to give her very rough treatment. For a few days while these catechumens were under guard, but not confined in the prison, they found means to be baptized; and Perpetua's prayers were directed particularly for patience under bodily pains. They were then put into a dark prison. To the rest, who had been more accustomed to hardships, this change of scene had not any thing in it very terrible. To her, who had experienced nothing but the delicacies of genteel life, it was peculiarly formidable and distressing: Her concern for her infant was extreme.—Tertius and Pomponius, two deacons of the Church, obtained by money, that the prisoners might go out of the dark dungeon, and for some hours refresh themselves in a more commodious place, where Perpetua gave the breast to her infant, and then recommended him carefully to her mother. For some time her mind was oppressed with concern for the misery she had brought on her family; though it was for the sake of a good conscience; but she grew more composed, and her prison became a palace.

Her father, some time after, came to the prison overwhelmed with grief; which, in all probability, was augmented by the reflections he had made on his own rough and angry behaviour to her at their last interview. "Have pity, my daughter," says he, "on my grey hairs; have pity on your father, if

ever worthy of that name : if I myself have brought you up to this age ; if I have preferred you to all your brethren, make me not a reproach to mankind : respect your father and your aunt"—these, it seems, were joined in the interests of paganism, while the mother appears to have been a Christian, otherwise his silence concerning her seems scarcely to be accounted for ;—" have compassion on your son, who cannot survive you : lay aside your obstinacy, lest you destroy us all : for if you perish we must all of us shut our mouths in disgrace." The old gentleman, with much tenderness, kissed her hands, threw himself at her feet, weeping and calling her no longer his daughter, but his mistress—the mistress of his fate ! He was the only person of the family who did not rejoice at her martyrdom. Perpetua, though inwardly torn with filial affection, could offer him no other comfort than to desire him to acquiesce in the Divine disposal.

The next day they were all brought into the court, and examined in the presence of vast crowds. There the unhappy old man appeared with his little grandson, and taking Perpetua aside conjured her to have some pity on her child. The procurator, Hilarian, joined in the suit, but in vain. The old man then attempted to draw his daughter from the scaffold. Hilarian ordered him to be beaten ; and a blow, which he received with a staff, was felt by Perpetua very severely.

Hilarian condemned them to be exposed to the wild beasts. They then returned cheerfully to their prison. Perpetua sent the deacon, Pomponius, to demand her child of her father, which he refused to return. The health of the child, we are told, suffered not ; nor did Perpetua feel any bodily inconvenience.

Secondulus died in prison. Felicitas was eight months gone with child ; and seeing the day of the public shows to be near, she was much afflicted lest

her execution should take place before her delivery. Her companions joined in prayer for her three days before the spectacles; and she was, with great difficulty, delivered of a child. One of the door-keepers, who, perhaps, expected to have found in her a stoical insensibility, and heard her cries, said, "Do you complain of THIS? what will you do when you are exposed to the beasts?" Felicitas answered, with a sagacity truly Christian, "It is I that suffer now, but then there will be another with me, that will suffer for me, because I shall suffer for his sake."—Her new-born daughter was delivered to a Christian Roman, who nursed it as her own.

The tribune appears to have credited a report, that the prisoners would free themselves by magical practices; and in consequence, to have treated them roughly. "Why don't you," says Perpetua, "give us some relief?" Will it not be for your honour that we should appear well fed at the spectacles?"

This address of hers had the desired effect: It procured a very agreeable alteration in their treatment. On the day before the shows, they were supplied with their last meal; and the martyrs did their utmost to convert it into an * *αγαπη*: they ate in public: their brethren and others were allowed to visit them: and the keeper of the prison himself, by this time, was converted to the faith: they talked to the people, and warned them to flee from the wrath to come: they pointed out to them their own happy lot, and smiled at the curiosity of those who ran to see them. "Observe well our faces," cries Satur, with much animation, "that ye may know them at the day of judgment."

The Spirit of God was much with them on the day of trial: joy, rather than fear, was painted on their looks. Perpetua, cherished by Jesus Christ, went on with a composed countenance and an easy face, holding down her eyes, lest the spectators

* A love-feast.



might draw wrong conclusions from their vivacity.— Some idolatrous garments were offered them by the Pagans: “We sacrifice our lives,” said they, “to avoid every thing of this kind.”—The tribune desisted from his demand.

Perpetua sang, as already victorious: and Revocatus, Saturninus, and Satur, endeavoured to affect the people with the fear of the wrath to come. Being come into Hilarian’s presence, “Thou judgest us,” said they, “and God shall judge thee.” The mob was enraged, and insisted on their being scourged before they were exposed to the beasts. It was done, and the martyrs rejoiced in being conformed to their Saviour’s sufferings.

Perpetua and Felicitas were stripped, and put into the nets, and exposed to a wild cow. The spectators were shocked at the sight: for the one was an accomplished beauty, and the other had been recently delivered of a child.—the assisting executioner drew them back and covered them with loose garments. Perpetua was first attacked; and falling backwards she put herself into a reclining posture: and seeing her habit torn by her side, she retired to cover herself: she then gathered up her hair, that she might seem less disordered: she raised herself up, and seeing Felicitas bruised, she gave her her hand and lifted her up: then they went toward the gate, where Perpetua was received by a catechumen, called Rusticus, who attended her: “I wonder,” said she, “when they will expose us to the cow;”—She had been, it seems, insensible of what had passed, nor could believe it till she saw on her body and clothes the marks of her sufferings. She caused her brother to be called, and addressing herself to him and Rusticus, she said. “Continue firm in the faith; love one another; and be neither frightened nor offended at our sufferings.”

The people insisted on having the martyrs brought into the midst of the amphitheatre, that they might

UNDER SEVERUS, &c.

have the pleasure of seeing them die : some of them rose up and went forward of they own accord, after having given one another the kiss of charity : others received the last blow without speaking or stirring, Perpetua fell into the hands of an unskilful gladiator, who pierced her between the ribs so as to give her much unnecessary pain. She cried out ; and then she herself guided his trembling hand to her throat :—and thus with the rest she slept in Jesus.

Augustine, in his exposition of the forty-seventh Psalm, takes notice of the victorious strength of divine love prevailing over all natural affections, and produces this same Perpetua as an example * :—“ We know and read thus in the sufferings of the blessed Perpetua.”—He mentions the same story also in three other places in his treatise of the soul †. But it is evident that he doubts whether Perpetua herself wrote what is ascribed to her. If so, we may well doubt ; and more than doubt the truth of the visions with which this excellent narrative has been intermixed ; and with which I have not thought it worth while to trouble the reader. Yet the general history has every mark of authenticity.—Augustine himself published three sermons on the anniversary of the martyrs. It is much to be regretted that the finest monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity have been thus tarnished by mixtures of fraud or superstition.—The authority of Augustine has enabled me to distinguish with some degree of precision the truth from the falsehood. My business does not call me to recite the frauds ; and it will be needless to add further remarks : The pious reader sees, with pleasure, that God was yet present with his people.—indeed the power of God appeared evidently displayed during the course of this dreadful persecution, by the sudden and amazing conversions of several persons who voluntarily suffered death for that

* Tom. v. iii. † L. 1. C. 10. L. 3. C. 9. L. 4. 18. Tom. 7.

—These works of Origen, in addition to his constant diligence, both in writing and in preaching, are monuments at least of the most laudable industry. The evangelical reader would wish, no doubt, to see stronger signs of real Christian proficiency in experimental and practical religion ;—but we must be content with such matter as the ecclesiastical records affords us.

One Ambrose, addicted to the Valentinian heresy, an extremely fanciful and romantic scheme, not worthy of the reader's attention, found himself confuted by Origen, and was brought over to the Church. Many learned men also felt the force of his argumentations. Heretics and philosophers attended his lectures ; and he took, no doubt, a very excellent method to procure regard to himself at least ;—he instructed them in profane and secular learning. He confuted the opinions of the different sects by opposing them to each other ; and he exposed the various fallacies with so much acuteness and sagacity, that he obtained among the gentiles the reputation of a great Philosopher. He encouraged many persons to study the liberal arts, assuring them, that they would, by that means, be much better furnished for the contemplation of the Holy Scriptures :—He was entirely of opinion, that secular and philosophical institutes were very necessary and profitable to his own mind.—Does it escape the reader, how much in the course of the Christian annals we are already departed, though by insensible degrees, from Christian simplicity ? Here is a man looked up to with reverence, at least by the Eastern Church, as a great luminary ;—a man, who, in his younger days, was himself a scholar of the amphibious Ammonius ; who mixed together Christianity and Pagan philosophy ; and who, by reading his motley lectures, drew over, in form at least, many of the heathen philosophers to embrace the religion of Jesus. These mention him

his death ; and he had himself been nursed, when an infant, by a Christian woman. Though this could not win his heart to Jesus Christ, it gave him an early predilection in favour of Christians, insomuch that when he was seven years old, observing one of his play-fellows to be beaten because he followed the Christian religion*, he could not for some time after behold with patience either his own father or the father of the boy. Certainly few men have ever exceeded him in the ferocious vices; yet, during the six years and two months which he reigned, the Christians found in him friendship and protection. Indeed, for the space of thirty and eight years,—from the death of Severus to the reign of Decius,—if we except the short turbulent interval of Maximinus, the Church enjoyed a continued calm†.—About the year two hundred and ten, Origen came to Rome, where Zephyrinus was bishop, desirous of visiting that ancient Church, but soon returned to Alexandria, and to his office of catechising. He entrusted to Heraclas, his associate in that employment, the instruction of the more ignorant, while he himself took care of those who had made a greater proficiency. His active spirit induced him to study the Hebrew language; and the first fruit of his labour was the publication of the Hexapla. In this great work he gave the Hebrew text and the translations of the Septuagint, of Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion,—and two others, which had long been obsolete, and whose authors were unknown. Of these interpreters, Symmachus was an Ebionite; that is, he held that Christ was but a mere man ‡; and he inveighed against the genuine Gospel of St. Matthew, for no other reason, that I can see, but on account of the clear testimony which the beginning of it affords against his heresy.

Origen
comes to
Rome,

A. D.
210.

* Spartian's Caracalla. The Pagan author says, "because he followed the Jewish Religion;" but, most probably, he means the Christian.

† Sulpitius Severus, B. 2. C. 42.

‡ Euseb. B. 6.

learning always command the esteem of mankind:—but, what are all his labours which we have now before us, but vain attempts to mix things which the Holy Ghost has declared will not incorporate? The mischief which actually followed was to be expected: Characters were confounded: and henceforward, among the learned, the distinction between Christian godliness and human philosophy is but faintly marked.—If Origen had simply and plainly expounded to his learned auditors the peculiar and vital truths of the Gospel, I cannot but suspect that many of them would have ceased to attend his instructions.

The famous Porphyry,—than whom Christianity had never a more acrimonious enemy,—takes notice of Origen's allegorical mode of interpreting Scripture, observes that he was acquainted with him when young, and bears testimony to his rapid improvements under Ammonius. He asserts,—what indeed Eusebius, who must have known, contradicts,—that Ammonius, though brought up a Christian, turned afterwards a gentile. He acknowledges “that Origen continually perused Plato, Numenius, and the rest of the Pythagoreans; that he was well versed in Chæremon the Stoic, and in Cornutus; and, that from all these masters he borrowed the Grecian manner of allegorical interpretation, and applied it to the Jewish Scriptures.”

We have seen, before, the wanton spirit of allegory introduced by Ammonius: and it is very probable that Origen then first learnt to treat the Scriptures in the same manner. He had the candour to confess that he had been mistaken in his literal interpretation of our Saviour's words concerning eunuchs. He afterwards fell into the contrary extreme, and allegorized all the three clauses in the Gospel of St. Matthew*;—and introduced such a complicated

* Chap. xix. 12.

scheme of fanciful interpretation, as for many ages after,—through the excessive respect paid to this man,—much obscured the light of Scripture.

There wanted not, however, some persons who found fault with Origen for all this attachment to pagan philosophy. Probably, simple, docile, ingenuous minds, which desired to be fed with the “SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD, THAT THEY MIGHT GROW THEREBY,” found themselves starved amidst all this heterogeneous, inconsistent doctrine. He felt himself called upon to vindicate his practice;—which he does, only by observing the use of philosophy in confuting heretics; and by the example of Pantænus, and of Heraclas, an Alexandrian pastor,—his coadjutor, who formerly had worn the common dress, and afterwards took up the philosopher’s garb, and still studied earnestly the writings of the heathen philosophers. What does all this prove but the destructive progress of this epidemical disease?

The governor of Arabia sent to Demetrius, desiring the instruction of Origen; who did not hesitate to undertake the necessary journey for that purpose; and he then returned back to Alexandria.

The elegant publication of Minucius Felix,—a work deserving even to be ranked among the Latin classics for neatness and purity of style, was an ornament to the Latin Church. The arguments contained in it against Paganism are well pointed and well adapted to the state of the world at that time: It is only to be regretted that we see not more of the real nature of Christianity in that celebrated performance.

In the year two hundred and seventeen, Macri-

Macrinus
succeeds
Caracalla,

A. D.

217.



CHAP. VI.

STATE OF CHRISTIANITY DURING THE REIGN
OF MACRINUS, HELIOGABALUS, ALEXANDER,
MAXIMINUS, PUPIENUS, GORDIAN, AND PHILIP.CHAP.
VI.

Macrinus
reigns one
year and
two months.

Heliogaba-
lus suc-
ceeds, and
is slain,

A. D.
222.

MACRINUS reigned one year and two months; and was succeeded by Heliogabalus; whose follies and vices are infamous; but it does not appear that the Church of God suffered on that account. He seems not to have conceived any particular prejudices against Christians; on the contrary, he expressed a desire of removing their rites of worship to Rome.—It is not worth while to attempt an explanation of the views of so senseless a prince.—He was slain at the age of eighteen, in the year two hundred and twenty-two, after he had swayed the sceptre three years and nine months. His cousin Alexander succeeded him; who was then only in the sixteenth year of his age, but was esteemed one of the best moral characters in profane history. His mother Mammæa, is called by Eusebius*, a most godly and religious woman.—I am at a loss to vindicate the expression.—It does not appear that she received the faith of Christ:—however,—neither she nor her son persecuted, they rather approved and countenanced, the Christians. They were persons of candour and probity themselves; and they saw that, in morals at least, the people of God concurred with their own views. Their conduct was laudable; but—**MARK** the mischief of blending philosophy with Christianity! How cheap is the term **GODLY** grown in the eyes of Eusebius!

The providence of God not only secured his Church from suffering, but procured it a favourable patron in this princess and her son. The emperor had a domestic chapel, where, every morning, he worshipped

* Euseb. L. 6. Fleury, B. v. 1v

those deceased princes, whose characters were most esteemed: their statues were placed among those of the gods: and into this company he introduced Apollonius of Tyana, Jesus Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus*. He had a desire to erect even a temple to Christ, and to receive him regularly into the number of the gods.

There are on record other instances of his candour towards the Christians.—The right of possessing a certain piece of ground was claimed by a tavern-keeper: It had been common for a long time†, and the Christians had occupied it for a place of worship.—“It is fitter,” said Alexander, “that God should be served there, in any manner whatever, rather than that it should be used for a tavern.” He frequently used this Christian sentence, “DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY.” He obliged a crier to repeat it when he punished any person; and was so fond of it, that he caused it to be written in his palace and in the public buildings. When he was going to appoint governors of provinces or other officers, he proposed their names in public, giving the people notice, that if they had any crime to accuse them of, they should come forward and make it known. “It would be a shame,” says he, “not to do that with respect to governors. who are entrusted with men’s properties and lives, which is done by Jews and Christians when they publish the names of those whom they mean to ordain Priests.” And, indeed, by Origen’s account‡, the Christians were so very careful in the choice of their pastors, that the civil magistrates were by no means to be compared with them in probity and sound morality. This prince had, it seems, too much gravity and virtue for the times in which he lived:—for some persons, in derision, called him Archysynagogus||.

* Lamprid.

† That is, without owner or possessor.

‡ Ag. Celsus, B. iii. and viii.

|| The chief ruler of the synagogue.



It seems to have been his plan to encourage every thing that carried the appearance of religion and virtue: and to discountenance whatever was openly immoral and profane.—His historian * tells us “that he favoured astrologers, and permitted them to teach publicly; that he himself was well skilled in the vain science of the Aruspices, and was master of that of the Augurs in a high degree.”

Alexander
resides at
Antioch.

A. D.
229.

In the year two hundred and twenty-nine, Alexander was obliged to go to the East, and to reside at Antioch. His mother Mammæa went with him, and having heard of the fame of Origen, and being very curious to hear new things; she sent him a guard, and caused him to come to her. All the account we have of this interview is, that he continued there awhile, and published many things to the glory of God, and concerning the power of the heavenly doctrine; and, that he then returned to his school at Alexandria.

What Origen taught this princess we are not told: What he ought to have taught her, the Acts of the Apostles would have amply informed him—A plain and artless declaration of the vanity and wickedness of all the reigning idolatries and philosophical sects: and what is still more—of the corruption, helplessness, and misery of man, and a faithful information concerning the only way of salvation by Jesus Christ, the great duty of believing on him, of confessing him, and of admitting the sanctifying operations of his Spirit,—these things a perfectly sound preacher would have shown to her; and his exhortations would have been entirely founded on these doctrines; nor would he have felt the necessity of aiding his message by the authority of Plato or of any other philosopher.—History informs us of no remarkable effect which attended the ministry of Origen on this occasion. That he spake what he believed and what he thought

* Lampridius.

STATE OF CHRISTIANITY.

most wise and expedient, is not to be doubted; but we may be allowed to lament, that his own state and views were too similar to those of Mammæa and of her son, to permit him to represent Christianity to them in the clearest and the most striking manner. In truth, it is to be feared that a number of Christians so called at this time, were much of the same religion with Alexander himself.—He seems to have learnt, in some measure, the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead; and by the help of the eclectic philosophy to have consolidated all religions into one mass.—But the Scriptural method of teaching things that accompany salvation will not incorporate with this system of doctrines.

The liberality of his friend Ambrose enabled Origen to prosecute his Scriptural studies with vast rapidity. Ambrose himself was a deacon of the Church; and, by his faithfulness under persecution, he obtained the name of Confessor.

At this time Noctus of Smyrna propagated the same heresy in the East, which Praxeas had done in the West,—namely, that there was no distinction among the Divine Persons. The pastors of the Church of Ephesus summoned him before them; and demanded whether he really maintained this opinion. At first he denied it; but afterwards, having formed a party, he became more bold, and publicly taught his heresy. Being again interrogated by the pastors, he said, “What harm have I done? I glorify none but one God; I know none besides him who hath been begotten, who suffered and died.” He evidently, in this way, confounded the persons of the Father and the Son together; and being obstinate in his views, he was ejected out of the Church with all his disciples.—We have here an additional proof of the jealousy of the primitive Christians in support of the fundamental articles of Christianity: The connexion also indissolubly preserved between heretical pravity and pride of

heart appeared in this teacher.—He called himself Moses, and his brother Aaron*.

Origen
ordained
priest,

A. D.
230.

Origen was now sent for to Athens to assist the Churches, which were there disturbed with several heresies. Thence he went to Palestine. At Cæsarea, Theoctistus the bishop, and Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, ordained him a priest at the age of forty-five, about the year two hundred and thirty. Demetrius, his own bishop, was offended; and, at length, divulged what had hitherto been kept very secret,—the indiscreet self-mutilation before mentioned, which took place in the youth of Origen. Alexander defended himself in what he had done, by the encomium which Demetrius had given of Origen in his letter. The latter, on his return to Alexandria, found his bishop quite incensed against him; for he procured even his ejection from the Church by a council of pastors, on account of some errors that appeared in his works. What judgment is to be formed of these errors I shall have a future occasion to consider. Banished from Egypt, this great man lived now in Palestine, with his friends Theoctistus and Alexander, still followed by many disciples, and particularly respected by Firmilian of Cappadocia, who looked upon it as a happiness to enjoy his instructions. Here also the famous Gregory Thaumaturgus attended his theological lectures, which, even in his exile, were delivered in Origen's usual manner.

Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, died, after having held that office forty-three years. A long period!—but our information is too indistinct and scanty to enable us to pronounce his real character. If we were sure that he preserved a very upright conscience toward God in things of essential moment, something might be advanced to justify his severe treatment of Origen: but, as we are left on that head to

* Fleury, B. v. Epiphanius and Theodoret.

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conjectures, it is, perhaps, better to be silent.—Origen's assistant Heraclas succeeded him.

In the year two hundred and thirty-five Alexander was murdered together with his mother; and Maximin the murderer obtained the empire. His malice against the house of Alexander disposed him to persecute the Christians; and he gave orders to put to death the pastors of the Churches. The persecution was not confined to them. Others suffered at the same time; and, it seems by Firmilian's letter to Cyprian of Carthage, that the flame extended to Cappadocia. Ambrose, the friend of Origen, and Protoctetus, minister of Cæsarea, suffered much in the course of it; and to them Origen dedicated his Book of Martyrs. He himself was obliged to retire. But the tyrant's reign lasted only three years, in which time it must be confessed that the rest of the world had tasted of his ferocity as much as the Christians had.—His persecution of THEM was local; but his cruelty to mankind in general seemed to have no limits.

Pupienus and Balbinus, the successors of Maximin, were slain in the year two hundred and thirty-eight; Gordian reigned for six years, and was then supplanted by the usual military turbulence, which made way for his murderer, Philip the Arabian.

Origen, in a letter to his scholar Gregory Thaumaturgus, exhorts him to apply himself chiefly to the holy Scripture; to read it very attentively; not to speak or judge of it lightly, but with unshaken faith and prayer, which, says he, is absolutely necessary for the understanding of it.—This exhortation will be noticed by the pious reader, doubtless, with much satisfaction. It proves that his philosophy had not obliterated his Christianity.

A fresh attempt was now made to pervert the doctrine of the person of Christ.—Beryllus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia, affirmed that our Saviour, before his incarnation, had no proper divinity, but only his

Father's divinity dwelling in himself. Thus Eusebius states the matter. It is not easy to form clear ideas of these sentiments: they seem, however, to annihilate the divine personality of the eternal Word. The man, it seems, was not obstinate; he listened to sound scriptural argument, and was therefore reclaimed by means of Origen. He even loved his instructor ever after, and was sincerely thankful to him;—a circumstance, which reflects an amiable light on the character of Beryllus*.

Philip
eigns,

A. D.
244.

He allows
idolatrious
games,

A. D.
247.

Philip began to reign in the year two hundred and forty-four. Eusebius tells us that he was a Christian; and indeed that he was so, by PROFESSION, seems well attested by the concurrent voice of antiquity. He is said to have submitted to certain ecclesiastical censures from a bishop; but the report is void of proper authenticity;—and most probably, he ranked at his death only as a Catechumen.—There is, however, no doubt, but in the fourth year of his reign, and in the year of Christ two hundred and forty-seven, he allowed and conducted the secular games, which were full of idolatry: and this is a fact, which clearly proves that he was not disposed to give up any thing for the sake of Christ: And, in general, there is not the least ground to conclude from history that he was a cordial friend to the Gospel.—Nevertheless the progress of Christianity in the world at this time must have been very great, which could induce so worldly-minded a person as Philip to countenance it without reserve or ambiguity.—To this emperor and to his wife Severa, Origen wrote an epistle, which was extant in Eusebius's time.

It appears from one of the homilies of Origen, that the long peace which the Church,—with only the short interruption of Maximin's persecution,—had enjoyed, was followed by a great degree of luke-

* Hieronym. Eccle. Scrip. L. xx.—See Dr. Waterland on the Importance of the Trinity.

warmness and even of much religious indecorum. Let the reader only notice the difference between the scenes which he here describes, and the conduct of the Christians both in the first and second century, and he will be affected with the greatness of the declension.

“Several *,” says he, “come to Church only on solemn festivals ; and then, not so much for instruction as diversion ; Some go out again as soon as they have heard the lecture, without conferring or asking the pastors any questions : Others stay not till the lecture is ended ; and others hear not so much as a single word : but entertain themselves in a corner of the church.”

By the blessing of Almighty God, nothing was so likely to conquer this careless spirit, as the faithful dispensation of the peculiar truths of the Gospel in a practical manner, so as to search the heart.—But the ability as well as the taste for doing this had much declined, in the Eastern part of the Church especially.—Origen complains elsewhere of the ambitious and haughty manners of pastors, and of the improper steps which some took to obtain **PREFEMENTS**.

This great man was now once more employed in Arabia in confuting another error, namely,—of those who denied the intermediate state of souls ; and this he managed with his usual good success †.

Philip enjoyed the fruits of his crimes five years, and was then slain and succeeded by Decius.—A little before his death, in the year two hundred and forty-eight, **CYPRIAN** was chosen bishop of Carthage.—A star of the first magnitude,—when we consider the times in which he lived.—Let us recreate ourselves with the contemplation of it : We are fatigued with hunting for Christian goodness ; and we have discovered but little : and that little with much difficulty.—We shall find Cyprian to be a **character**,

Cyprian
made
bishop of
Carthage,

A. D.
248.

* Fleury.

† Euseb. B. vi. 36.

who partook indeed of the declensions which we have noticed and lamented ; but who was still far superior, I apprehend, in real simplicity and piety, to the Christians of the East.

CHAP. VII.

THE CONVERSION OF CYPRIAN.

CHAP.
VII.

Conversion
of Cyprian,
A. D.
246.

THE life of this prelate was written by Pontius his deacon. It is to be regretted, that one who must have known him so well, should have written in so incompetent a manner. Very little distinct information is to be gathered from him ; but Cyprian's own letters are extant, and from them I shall endeavour to exhibit whatever is of the greatest moment. They are, in truth, a valuable treasure of ecclesiastical history : The spirit, taste, discipline, and habits of the times, among Christians, are strongly delineated ; nor have we in all the third century any account to be compared with them. He was a professor of oratory in the city of Carthage, and a man of wealth, quality, and dignity. Cæcilius, a Carthaginian presbyter, had the felicity, under God, to conduct him to the knowledge of Christ ; and, in his gratitude, Cyprian afterwards assumed the prænomen of Cæcilius. His conversion was about the year two hundred and forty-six ; and two years before his elevation to the see of Carthage. About thirteen years comprehend the whole scene of his Christian life.—But God can do great things in a little time ; or to speak more nervously with the sacred writer, “ ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS.” He did not proceed by slow painful steps of argumentation, but seems to have been led on with vast rapidity by the effectual operation of the Divine Spirit :—and he happily escaped

in a great measure at least, the shoals and quicksands of false learning and self-conceit, which so much tarnished the character of his eastern brethren. Faith and love in native simplicity appear to have been possessed by him when an early convert. He saw with pity the poor of the flock; and he knew no method so proper of employing "the unrighteous mammon as in relieving their distress*."—He sold whole estates for their benefit.

It was an excellent rule of the Apostle concerning ordination, "Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." There appeared, however, in Cyprian a spirit at once so simple, so zealous, and so intelligent, that in about two years after his conversion he was chosen presbyter, and then bishop of Carthage.

It was no feigned virtue that thus advanced him in the eyes of the people. With Cyprian the love of Christ evidently preponderated above all secular considerations. In vain his wife opposed his Christian spirit of liberality. The widow, the orphan, and the poor, found in him a sympathizing benefactor continually. The presbyter Cæcilius must have beheld with much delight the growing virtues of his pupil:—When dying, he recommended to his care his own wife and children. It was with no satisfaction that Cyprian observed the designs of the people to choose him for their bishop. He retired, to avoid solicitation: His house was besieged: His retreat was rendered impossible. He yielded at length, and with much reluctance accepted the PAINFUL PRE-EMINENCE: for so he soon found it.—Five presbyters, however, were enemies to his exaltation. His lenity, patience, and benevolence towards them were remarked by every one.

The active spirit of Cyprian was, no doubt, much employed before he was made a bishop: Indeed Pontius tells us, that this was actually

* Pontius, Vit. Cyp.

IAP. but he communicates no particulars. **St. Austin**
II. says, that his letter to Donatus was his first work ;
 and, therefore, the time of writing it may safely be
 placed before his arrival at episcopal dignity. Part
 of this letter, as it will illustrate his conversion, and
 show the spirit of a man penetrated with divine love,
 and lately recovered from the idolatry of the world,
 well deserves to be translated.—“ I find your whole
 care and concern at present is for conversion : you
 look at me ; and in your affection, expect much
 from me :—I fear I cannot answer your expec-
 tations.—Small fruits must be looked for from my
 unworthiness ;—Yet, I will make the attempt ; for the
SUBJECT MATTER is all on my side.—Let plausible
 arts of ambition be used in courts ; but when we
 speak of the Lord God, plainness and sincerity, not
 the powers of eloquence, should be used. Hear,
 then, things not eloquent, but important ; not courtly,
 but rude and simple ;—so, should the divine goodness
 be celebrated always with artless truth.—Hear, then,
 an account of something which is felt before it is
 learnt ; and is not collected by a long course of
 speculation, but is imbibed by the soul through the
 compendium of grace ripening her, as it were, all
 at once.

“ While I lay in darkness and the night of pagan-
 ism, and when I fluctuated uncertain and dubious
 with wandering steps in the sea of a tempestuous age,
 ignorant of my own life, and alienated from light and
 truth, it appeared to me a harsh and difficult thing,
 as my manners then were, to obtain what divine
 grace had promised,—namely, that a man should be
 born again ; and that, being animated to a new life
 by the salutary washing of regeneration *, he should
 strip himself of what he was before, and though the
 body remained the same, he should, in his mind,

* An instance we have here of the powerful effects of rege-
 neration attending baptism in those days.

become altogether a new creature. How can so great a change be possible, said I,—that a man should suddenly and at once put off what nature and habit have confirmed in him. These evils are deeply and closely fixed in us. How shall he learn parsimony, who has been accustomed to expensive and magnificent feasts? And how shall he, who has been accustomed to purple, gold, and costly attire, condescend to the simplicity of a plebeian habit? Can he who was delighted with the honours of ambition, live private and obscure? Further,—the man has been accustomed to crowds of clients, and will think solitude the most dreadful punishment.—He must still, thought I, be infested by tenacious allurements: Drunkenness, pride, anger, rapacity, cruelty, ambition, and lust, must still domineer over him.

“ These reflections engaged my mind very often; or they were peculiarly applicable to my own case,—I was myself entangled in many errors of my former life, from which I did not think it possible to be cleared: hence, I favoured my vices, and, through despair of what was better, I stuck close to them as part of my very frame and constitution. But after the filth of my former sins was washed away in the laver of regeneration, and divine light, from above, had infused itself into my heart, now purified and cleansed; after, through the effusion of the Holy Spirit from heaven, the new birth had made me a new creature indeed,—immediately, and in an amazing manner, dubious things began to be cleared up; things once shut were opened; dark things shone forth; and what before seemed difficult and even impossible, now appeared easy and practicable. I saw that, that which was born after the flesh and had lived enslaved by wickedness, was of the “earth, earthy;” but that the new life, now animated by the Holy Ghost, began to be of God. You know and recollect, as perfectly as I do, my conversion from a deadly criminal state to a state of lively virtue. I know

what these opposite states have done for me :—what they have taken away; and what they have conferred: and, therefore, I need not proclaim it: To boast of one's own merits is odious; though that cannot be called an expression of boasting, but of gratitude, which ascribes nothing to the virtue of man, but professes all to proceed from the gift of God: Thus deliverance from sin is the consequence of sound faith:—The preceding sinful state was owing to human blindness.—Of God it is,—of God, I say, even all that we can do: thence we live;—thence we have strength;—thence we conceive and assume vigour; even though, as yet, placed here below, we have some clear foretaste of our future felicity. Only,—let fear be the guardian of innocence; that the Lord, who kindly shone into our minds with an effusion of heavenly grace, may be detained as our guest by the steady obedience of the soul which delights in him,—lest pardon received should beget a careless presumption, and the old enemy break in afresh.

“ But if you keep the road of innocence and of righteousness, if you walk with footsteps that do not slide;—if, depending upon God with all your heart and with all your might, you be only what you have begun to be, you will then find, that according to the proportion of faith, so will your attainments and enjoyments be. For no bound or measure can be assigned in the reception of divine grace, as is the case of earthly benefits. The Holy Spirit is poured forth copiously; is confined by no limits; is restrained by no barriers; he flows perpetually; he bestows in rich abundance: Let our heart only thirst and be open to receive him: As much of capacious faith as we bring, so much abounding grace do we draw from him. Hence an ability is given, with sober chastity, uprightness of mind, and purity of language, to heal the sick, to extinguish the force of poison, to cleanse the filth of distempered minds,

to speak peace to the hostile ; to give tranquillity to the violent, and gentleness to the fierce ; to compel, by menaces, unclean and wandering spirits to quit their hold of men ; to scourge and control the foe, and by torments to bring him to confess what he is. —Thus, in what we have already begun to be, our new spiritual nature, which is entirely the gift of God, triumphs in its freedom from the bondage of sin and Satan ; though, till our corruptible body and members be changed, the prospect, as yet carnal, is obscured by the clouds of worldly objects. What a faculty, what an energy is this !—that the soul should not only be emancipated from slavery, and be made free and pure ; but also stronger and more efficient, so as to become victorious and triumphant over the powers of the enemy !”

The testimony here given to the ejection of evil spirits, as a common thing among the Christians, even in the third century, deserves to be noticed, as a proof that miraculous influences had not ceased in the Church. Minutius Felix speaks to the same purpose, and I think with more precision. “ Being adjured by the living God, they tremble and remain wretched and reluctant in the bodies of men : they either leap out immediately, or vanish by degrees, as the faith of the patient or the grace of the person administering relief may be strong or weak.”—Indeed the testimony of the Fathers in these times is so general and concurrent, that the fact itself cannot be denied without universally impeaching their veracity. It is not my province to dwell on this point : The sanctifying graces of the Spirit call for my particular attention ; and these are described by Cyprian as by one who had seen and tasted them. No doubt, after his conversion, he experienced in himself vital, energetic, and divine principles, far beyond the reach of ordinary rational processes ;—and he appeals to his friend Donatus if he had not also felt the same.

We may safely, therefore, infer that such things were not then infrequent among Christians, though, certainly, the EFFUSIONS of the Holy Ghost did not so much abound as in the two former centuries.—Indeed, what but the power of God on the heart can account for a change so sudden, so rapid, and yet so firm and solid, as that of Cyprian? What can be conceived more opposite than the last thirteen years of his life compared with the former part of it?—Will modern fastidiousness call all this enthusiasm?

In this narrative, the reader will notice, that the essential doctrines of justification and regeneration by divine grace were not only believed but experienced by this zealous African.—The difference between mere human and divine teaching is rendered striking by such cases. With no great furniture of learning, it was HIS happiness to know little, if any thing, of the then reigning philosophy.—We see a man of business and of the world rising at once a Phoenix in the Church; and though no extraordinary Theologian in point of accurate knowledge, yet an useful practical Divine, an accomplished Pastor, flaming with the love of God and of souls, and with unremitting activity spending and being spent for Christ Jesus.—This is the Lord's doing; and it should be remarked as HIS WORK.—We shall see that Cyprian's own conversion prepared him for actual service.—Argument and dispute prevailed among Christians in the East;—brotherly love in the West.

He records a remarkable influence of Divine Grace, which to him appeared to have accompanied his baptism. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that this was commonly the case at that time. The inward and spiritual grace really attended the outward and visible sign. And it is to be lamented, that the corruption and perversion of after-ages, availing itself of the ambiguous language of the fathers on this sub-

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ject,—which, with them, was natural enough,—supposed a NECESSARY connexion to take place where there had been a frequent one. In Cyprian's time, to call baptism itself the new birth was not very dangerous: In our age it is poison itself: Men are apt to content themselves with the outward and visible sign; and it has long been the fashion to suppose all persons, who have been baptized when they were infants, to be, of course, when they are grown up, in a state of regeneration by the Holy Spirit: and thus men have learned to furnish themselves with a convenient evasion of all that is written in Scripture concerning the godly motions of the third person of the sacred Trinity*.

Cyprian goes on,—“And that the marks of divine goodness may appear the more perspicuously by a discovery of the truth, I would lay open to your view the real state of the world;—I would remove the thick darkness which covers it, and detect the hidden mischiefs and the evils which it contains.—For a little time, fancy yourself withdrawn to the top of a high mountain;—thence inspect the appearance of things below you; look all around;—preserve yourself unfettered by worldly connexions,—observe the fluctuating tempests of the world;—you will then pity mankind; you will understand and be sensible of your own happiness;—you will be more thankful to God; and, with more joy, you will congratulate yourself on your escape.”

He then gives an affecting view of the immensity of evils which the state of mankind at that time

* It is true that the term regeneration may be so defined as to imply no more than the mere ceremony of baptism. But the real danger is, lest by any contrivances in our definitions, we either do away entirely, or at least weaken, the necessity of the operations of the Holy Spirit, so essential both in the first work of conversion, and also in the carrying on of that work; or in the words of our Tenth Article, so essential in “preventing us that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will.”

CHAP. VIII.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PERSECUTION OF
DECIUS.—THE GOVERNMENT OF CYPRIAN TILL
HIS RETIREMENT.CHAP.
VIII.

How Cyprian conducted himself in his bishopric, who is sufficient to relate? says Pontius, in the fulness of his admiration. Some PARTICULAR account, however, might have been expected from one who had such large opportunity of information. He does make some brief observations on his external appearance. “His looks had the due mixture of gravity and cheerfulness; so that it was doubtful whether he were more worthy of love or of reverence. His dress also was correspondent to his looks: He had renounced the secular pomp to which his rank in life entitled him;—yet he avoided affected penury.”—From a man of Cyprian’s piety and good sense united, such a conduct might be expected.

The VIIth
Persecution
by Decius,A. D.
250.

While Cyprian was labouring to recover the spirit of godliness among the Africans, which long peace had corrupted, Philip was slain, and succeeded by Decius. His enmity to the former emperor conspired with his pagan prejudices to bring on the most dreadful persecution which the Church had yet experienced. It was evident that nothing less than the destruction of the Christian name was intended. The chronology is here remarkably embarrassed; nor is it an object of much consequence to trouble either myself or the reader with studious attempts to settle it. Suffice it to say, that the eventful period before us of Cyprian’s bishopric extends from the year two hundred and forty-eight to two hundred and sixty, and that Decius’s succession to the empire must have taken place about the beginning of it. The persecution raged with astonishing fury, beyond the example of former persecutions, both in the

The extent
of it,A. D.
248.
to
260.

East and West. The latter is the scene before us at present. In a treatise of Cyprian concerning the lapsed*, we have an affecting account of the declension from the spirit of Christianity, which had taken place before his conversion, and which moved God to chastise his Church. “If the cause of our miseries,” says he, “be investigated, the cure of the wound may be found. The Lord would have his family to be TRIED. And because long peace had corrupted the discipline divinely revealed to us, the heavenly chastisement hath raised up our faith, which had lain almost dormant: and when, by our sins, we had deserved to suffer still more, the merciful Lord so moderated all things, that the whole scene rather deserves the name of a trial than a persecution. Each had been bent on improving his patrimony; and had forgotten what believers had done under the Apostles, and what they ought always to do:—They were brooding over the arts of amassing wealth:—The pastors and the deacons each forgot their duty: Works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb.—Luxury and effeminacy prevailed: Meretricious arts in dress were cultivated: Fraud and deceit were practised among brethren.—Christians could unite themselves in matrimony with unbelievers; could swear not only without reverence, but even without veracity. With haughty asperity they despised their ecclesiastical superiors: They railed against one another with outrageous acrimony, and conducted quarrels with determined malice:—Even many bishops, who ought to be guides and patterns to the rest, neglecting the peculiar duties of their stations, gave themselves up to secular pursuits:—They deserted their places of residence and their flocks: They travelled through distant provinces in quest of pleasure and gain; gave no assistance to the needy brethren; but were insatiable in their

* Section 4.

thirst of money:—They possessed estates by fraud and multiplied usury. What have we not deserved to suffer for such a conduct? Even the Divine Word hath foretold us what we might expect, ‘IF HIS CHILDREN FORSAKE MY LAW, AND WALK NOT IN MY JUDGMENTS, I WILL VISIT THEIR OFFENCE WITH THE ROD, AND THEIR SIN WITH SCOURGES. These things had been denounced and foretold, but in vain: Our sins had brought our affairs to that pass, that because we had despised the Lord’s directions, we were obliged to undergo a correction of our multiplied evils and a trial of our faith by severe remedies.”

That a deep declension from Christian purity had taken place not only in the East, where false philosophy aided its progress, as we have seen, but also in the West, where the operation of no peculiar cause can be traced beyond the common influence of prosperity on human depravity, is now completely evident from this account of Cyprian; and,—it deserves to be remarked, that the first grand and general declension, after the primary EFFUSION of the Divine Spirit, should be fixed about the middle of this century. The wisdom and goodness of God is also to be observed in qualifying the bishop of Carthage by a strong personal work on his own heart: and then, in raising him to the See of Carthage, to superintend the western part of his Church in a time of trial like the present. The trial, no doubt, was kindly intended by Providence to operate as a medicine for the revival of the declining spirit of Christianity; but it needed, nevertheless, all that fortitude, zeal, and wisdom, with which Cyprian was so eminently endowed.

In such a situation it was not to be expected that the people under the bishop’s care should, in general, stand their ground: avarice had taken deep root among them; and vast numbers lapsed into idolatry immediately. Even before men were accused as

Christians, “many ran to the forum and sacrificed to the gods as they were ordered; and the crowds of apostates were so great* that the magistrates wished to delay numbers of them till the next day, but they were importuned by the wretched suppliants to be allowed to prove themselves heathens that very night.”

At Rome the persecution raged with unremitting violence. There Fabian the bishop suffered; and, for some time, it became impracticable to elect a successor: yet it does not appear that the metropolis suffered more, in proportion, than some other places, since we find that the flame of persecution had driven several bishops from distant provinces, and made them fly for shelter to Rome†. Cyprian, however, having been regularly informed by the Roman clergy of the martyrdom of their bishop, congratulated them on his glorious exit‡, and exulted on occasion of his uprightness and integrity. He expresses the pleasure he conceived in observing that his edifying example had so much penetrated their minds; and owns the energy which he himself felt to imitate the pattern.

Moyse and Maximus, two Roman presbyters, with other confessors, were also seized and imprisoned. Attempts were repeatedly made to persuade them to relinquish the faith, but in vain. Cyprian found means to write to THEM ALSO a letter full of benevolence, and breathing the strongest pathos§. He tells them that his heart was with them continually,—that he prayed for them in his public ministry,—and in private. He comforts them under the pressures of hunger and thirst which they endured, and congratulates them for living now not for this life but for the next; and particularly, because their example would be a means of confirming many

* Cypri. de lapsis. † Ep. 31. ‡ Ep. 4. § Ep. 16.

who were in a wavering state.—But Carthage soon became an unsafe scene to Cyprian himself.—By repeated suffrages of the people at the theatre he was demanded to be taken and given to the lions ; and it behoved him immediately either to retire into a place of safety, or to expect the crown of martyrdom.

Cyprian's spirit in interpreting Scripture was more simple, and more accommodated to receive its plain and obvious sense, than that of men who had learned to refine and subtilize. He knew the liberty which his Divine Master had giving to his people—of fleeing when they were persecuted in one city, to another ;—and he embraced it. Nay, he seems scarcely to have thought it lawful to do otherwise.—Even the last state of his martyrdom evinces this.—His manner of enduring it, when it, providentially, was brought on him, sufficiently acquits him of all suspicion of pusillanimity.—To unite such seemingly opposite things as discretion and fortitude, each in a very high degree, is a sure characteristic of greatness in a Christian :—It is grace in its highest exercise.—Pontius thinks it was not without a particular divine direction that he was moved to act in this manner for the benefit of the Church.

Behold him at present, in some place of retreat, under the protection of God, and through the love of his people safe for the space of two years from the arm of a most barbarous persecution ;—and let us next see how he employed this interval of retirement.

CHAP IX.

THE HISTORY OF CYPRIAN AND OF THE WESTERN
CHURCH DURING HIS RETIREMENT OF TWO
YEARS.

CYPRIAN was never more active than in his retreat. Nothing of moment occurred in ecclesiastical affairs either in Africa or in Italy with which he was unacquainted; and his counsels, under God, were of the greatest influence in both countries. I shall endeavour, from his own letters, which were written in this period, to abbreviate the account.

The presbyters of Carthage sent Clementius, a sub-deacon, to Rome, from whom the Roman clergy learnt the place of the retreat of the bishop. They, in return, express to the Africans their perfect agreement in opinion concerning the propriety of the concealment, because he was an eminent character, and a life extremely valuable to the Church. They represent the conflict as very important, which God had now permitted for the trial of his servants: They said, it was the express purpose of God to manifest both to angels and to men, that the conqueror shall be crowned, and the conquered, that is, the faithless apostate, be self-condemned. They express the deep sense which they had both of their own situation and that of the clergy of Carthage, whose duty it was to take care not to incur the censure passed on faithless shepherds in the prophet*, but rather to imitate their Lord the good shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep †, and who so earnestly and repeatedly charges Simon Peter, as a proof of his love to his Master, “to feed his sheep ‡.” “We would not wish, dear brethren,” say they, “to find you mere mercenaries, but good shepherds, since you know it must be highly sinful

* Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4.

† John, x.

‡ John, x.

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in you not to exhort the brethren to stand immovable in the faith, lest they be totally subverted by idolatry. Nor do we only in words thus exhort you ; but, as you may learn from many who came from us to you, our actions, with the help of God, accord with our declarations : we make no scruple to hazard our lives ; for we have before our eyes the fear of God and of eternal punishment, rather than the fear of men and of a temporary calamity : we do not desert the brethren ; we exhort them to stand in the faith, and to be ready to follow their Lord when called : We have also done our utmost to recover those who had gone up to sacrifice in order that they might save their lives. Our Church stands firm in the faith in general : Some, indeed, overcome by terror, either because they were persons in high life, or were moved by the fear of man, have lapsed ; yet these, though separated from us, we do not give up as lost altogether, but we exhort them to repent, if they may find mercy with him who is able to save : we would not, by abandoning them, render their case hopeless and incurable.

“ We wish you, brethren, to act in the same manner, as much as in you lies :—Exhort the lapsed, if they should be seized a second time, to confess their Saviour. And we suggest to you to receive again into communion any of these, if they heartily desire it, and give proofs of sound repentance. And certainly officers should be appointed to minister to the widows, the sick, those in prison, and those who are in a state of banishment. A special care should be exercised over the catechumens, to preserve them from apostasy ; and those whose duty it is to inter the dead, ought to consider the interment of the martyrs as matter of indispensable obligation.

“ Sure we are, that those servants, who shall be found to have been thus faithful in that which is least, will have “ authority over ten cities *.” May

* Luke xix, 19.

God, who does all things for those who hope in him, grant that we may all be found thus diligently employed ! The brethren in bonds, the clergy, and the whole Church salute you : We all of us with earnest solicitude watch and pray for all who call on the name of the Lord. And we beseech you, in return, to be mindful of us also in your prayers."

Several observations present themselves on this occasion. 1. It appears, that, both at Rome and Carthage, the reduced mode of episcopacy was the form of ecclesiastical government which gradually prevailed in the Christian world. It is not to be supposed that the whole body of Christians either at Rome, or at Carthage, was no more than what might be contained in one assembly.—The inference is obvious.

2. The Roman Church appears, in the beginning of Decius's persecution at least, to have been in a much more thriving state than that of Carthage, and their clergy to have been models worthy of imitation in all ages.

3. The administration of discipline among the Christians, wisely tempered by tenderness and strictness, is truly admirable.

4. The work of the Divine Spirit also amongst them, infusing the largest charity, even to the laying down of their lives for the brethren, is manifest beyond contradiction.—Now mark the spirit of a primitive pastor, full of charity and meekness, of zeal and prudence, in the following letter of Cyprian to his clergy :—

" Being hitherto preserved by the favour of God, I salute you, dearest brethren, and I rejoice to hear of your safety. As present circumstances permit not my presence among you, I beg you by your faith and by the ties of religion, to discharge your duties, in conjunction with mine also, that nothing be wanting either on the head of discipline or of diligence. I beg that nothing may be wanting to

ply the necessities of those, who are imprisoned because of their glorious profession and avowal of God, or who labour under the pressures of indigence and poverty, since the whole ecclesiastical fund is in the hands of the clergy for this very purpose, that a number may have it in their power to relieve the wants of individuals.

“ I beg further, that you would use every prudential and cautious method to procure the peace of the Church ; and if the brethren, in their charity, wish to confer with and to visit those pious suffering converts, whom the divine goodness hath thus far shone upon by such good beginnings, they should, however, do this cautiously, not in crowds, nor in a multitude ; lest any odium should hence arise, and the liberty of admission be denied altogether ; and lest while, through greediness, we aim at too much, we lose all. Consult therefore and provide, that this may be done safely and with discretion ; so that the presbyters, one by one, accompanied by the deacons in turn, may successively minister to them, because the change of persons visiting them is less liable to breed suspicion. For in all things we ought to be meek and humble, as becomes the servants of God, to redeem the time, to have a regard for peace, and to provide for the people. Most dearly beloved and longed-for, I wish you all prosperity, and entreat you to remember us. Salute all the brethren. Victor the deacon, and those that are with us, salute you *.”

The numerous defections which took place must have penetrated deeply the fervent and charitable spirit of Cyprian. Not only very many of the laity, but part of the clergy also had been seduced. “ I could have wished,” says he †, “ dearest brethren, to have had it in my power to salute your whole body sound and entire ; but as the melancholy tempest has, in addition to the fall of so many of the people, also

* Epis. 4.

† Epis. 5.

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affected part of the clergy,—sad accumulation of our sorrow ! we pray the Lord, that, by divine mercy, we may be enabled to salute you at least,—whom we have known hitherto to stand firm in faith and virtue,—as sound and unshaken followers of Christ for the time to come.—Though the cause loudly called on me to hasten my return to you ; first, on account of my own desire and regret for the loss of your company,—a desire which burns strongly within me ;—in the next place, that we might, in full council, settle the various objects in the Church which require attention ; yet, on the whole, to remain still concealed seemed more advisable on account of other advantages which pertain to the general safety, an account of which our dear brother Tertullus will give you ; who, agreeably to that care which he employs in divine works with so much zeal, was also the adviser of this council, that I should act with caution and moderation, and not rashly commit myself to the public view in a place where I had so often been sought and called for.

“ Relying therefore on your affection and conscientiousness, of which I have had good experience, I exhort and charge you by these letters, that you, whose situation is less dangerous and invidious, would supply my lack of service. Let the poor be attended to as much as possible,—those I mean, who have stood the test of persecution : suffer them not to want necessaries ; lest indigence do that against them which persecution could not. I know the charity of the brethren has provided for very many of them :—yet,—as I wrote to you before, even while they were in prison,—if any persons do want meat or clothing *, let their necessities be supplied.”

In the sequel of this epistle, he shows a deep knowledge of the depravity of the human heart, which is very apt to be puffed up with vain-glory and self-conceit, on the consciousness of having well per-

* It hence appears that a number of them had been released.

formed our part in any respect. I cannot forbear transcribing the following practical rules of humility.

“ Let them know,—that they must be instructed and taught by you ;—that the doctrines of Scripture require subordination in the people to their pastors ;—that they should cultivate an humble, modest, and peaceable demeanour ;—and that those who have been gloriously bold in the avowal of their faith, should be equally exemplary in all the branches of Christian conduct.—The harder trial yet remains :—The Lord saith, ‘ He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved *.’ Let them imitate the Lord, whose humility never shone more than at the eve of his passion, when he washed his disciples’ feet. The Apostle Paul too, after repeated sufferings, still continued mild and humble. His elevation to the third heaven begat in him no arrogance ; neither, says he, ‘ did we eat any man’s bread for nought, but laboured and travailed night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you †.’

“ All these duties do you instill into the minds of the brethren : and,—because he, who humbles himself, shall be exalted,—now is the time more particularly that they should fear the snares of the enemy of souls, who loves to attack even the strongest, and to revenge the disgrace which he has already sustained from them. The Lord grant that, in due season, I may be enabled to visit my people again ; and to exhort them to useful purpose. For I am grieved to hear that some of them run about idly, foolishly, and insolently ; or give themselves up to strife ; and even pollute, by fornication, those members which had confessed Christ ; and are not willing to be subject to the deacons or presbyters, but seem to act as if they intended, by the bad conduct of a few nominal Christians, to bring disgrace on the whole body. He is a true Christian indeed, on account of whom the Church need not blush, but glory.

* Matthew, x. 22.

† 2 Thess. iii. 8.

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“To the point, concerning which certain presbyters wrote to me, I can answer nothing alone; for, from the beginning of my appointment to this See, I determined to do nothing without your consent and the consent of the people. But when, by the favour of God, I shall have returned to you,—we will treat in common of all things.”

In* the next letter he dwells on the same subject, namely, the ill conduct of some of the confessors. The use of good discipline in the Church of God; the benefits of orderly subjection in the members; the danger of pride and self-exaltation; and—the deceitfulness of the human heart, are well stated, and in exceedingly strong terms.

After having congratulated his people on the steadiness of their confession, he reminds them of the necessity of perseverance, since faith itself and the new birth conduct us to life eternal, not merely as once received, but as preserved. He reminds them, that the Lord regards him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at his words;—and he rejoices to find that the greatest part of the confessors thus adorned the Gospel†.—But he had heard that some of them were puffed up: To these he exhibits the mild, charitable, and humble spirit of the Lamb of God: “And dare,” says he, “any one, who now lives by HIM and in HIM, to lift himself up with pride?—He that is least among you, the same shall be great. How execrable ought those immoralities and indecencies to appear among you, which we have heard of with the deepest sorrow of heart!”—He then repeats what he had before mentioned of the lasciviousness of some.

“Contentions and strifes ought to have no place among you, since the Lord has left us his peace. I beseech you abstain from reproaches and abuse;

* Epis. 6. ad Rogatianum presbyterum et cæteros confessores.

† A confessor means one who openly avowed himself to be a convert to Christianity, &c. See note, p. 357. *infra*.

—for he who speaks what is peaceable, and good, and just, according to the precepts of Christ, daily imitates his Lord and Master.—We renounced the world when we were baptized; but now we truly and in deed renounce the world, when, upon being tried and proved by God, we scruple not to give up our own wills; to follow the Lord; and to stand and live in his faith and fear. Let us strengthen one another with mutual exhortations, and strive to grow in the Lord;—that when, in his mercy, he shall give us that peace and tranquillity which he has promised, we may return to the Church as new men;—and that both our brethren and the gentiles may receive us improved in holy conduct; and may admire the excellency of the morals and discipline of those very Christians, who had astonished them by their fortitude during the persecution.”

The mind of Cyprian, full of the fear of God, and reflecting, from a comparison of Christian precepts with the bad practice of many, how exceedingly his people had provoked the Lord before the persecution, was vehemently incited to stir them up to repentance.—He addresses them from his recess*, as follows:—“Though I am sensible, dearest brethren, that as we all live in the obedient fear of God, you are instant in prayers, yet I also admonish you that we ought to breathe out our souls to God, not only in words, but also in fasting, tears, and every method of supplication. In truth, we must understand and confess that the apostasy which, in so large a degree, has wasted our flock and still wastes it, is the proper consequence of our sins.”

He then goes on to speak of their practical corruptions, as he does in his treatise concerning the lapsed. “And what plagues, what stripes do we not deserve, since even confessors, who ought to be patterns to the rest, are quite disorderly! Hence, while the proud and indecent boasting of their confession puffs up some, torments have come upon us,

* Epis. 7.

and torments unremitted;—tedious and most distressing; and so protracted as to exclude even the comfort of death itself!”

“ Let us pray with our whole heart for mercy: and if the answer to our prayers be slow because we have deeply offended;—let us knock; for to him that knocketh it shall be opened, when prayers, groans, and tears beat at the door.”—He then records some visions;—which, as they rather suit the dispensation of that age in which miracles were by no means wanting, I pass over.

“ Our Master himself prayed for us; because though himself no sinner, yet he bore our sins. And if HE laboured and watched on account of us and of our sins, how much more should WE be urgent in prayer? Brethren—let us first intreat our Lord himself, and then through him we may obtain favour with God the Father. The Father himself corrects and takes care of us, in the midst of all pressures, provided we remain firm in the faith, and stick close to his Christ;—as it is written, ‘ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?’ None of these can separate believers: Nothing can pluck away those, who adhere closely to his body and blood.—Persecution is the examination and trial of our heart. God would have us to be sifted and tried; nor was ever his help wanting in trials, to those who believe. Let our eyes be lifted up to heaven, lest earth with its enticements deceive us. If the Lord see us humble and quiet, lovingly united, and corrected by the present tribulation, he will deliver us. Correction has come first; pardon will follow: Let us only continue to pray in steady faith; and to behave like men placed between the ruins of the fallen, and the remains of those who are in fear,—between a multitude of the sick, and the few who have escaped a devouring pestilence.”

Thus the persecution at Carthage appears to have been very dreadful ; but mostly so on account of the number of apostates : The Christian faith, patience, and magnanimity of Cyprian and of a small remnant were in full exercise.

The persecutors endeavoured to lessen the number of Christians by banishing from Carthage all those who confessed Christ : but this not answering their purpose, they proceeded to cruel torments. Cyprian, hearing that some had expired under their sufferings, and that others were still in prison yet alive, wrote to these last a letter of encouragement and consolation. Their limbs had been sorely mangled and torn, so that they appeared like one continued wound ; yet they remained firm in the faith and love of Jesus. One of them, Mapalicus, amidst his torments, said to the proconsul, “ To-morrow you shall see a contest for a prize.” —He alluded to the crown of martyrdom ; and, what he uttered in faith, the Lord fulfilled :—He lost his life in the conflict on the next day*.

So eagerly and so firmly was the mind of Cyprian fixed on heavenly things ; and so completely lifted up above the world, that he ardently exulted and triumphed amidst those scenes of horror. He describes the martyrs and confessors as wiping away the tears of the Church, while she was bewailing the ruins of her sons. He represents even Christ himself as looking down with complacency ; fighting and conquering in his servants ; and giving strength to believers in proportion to their faith ;—“ He was present in the contest,” says he ; “ He encouraged, corroborated, animated his warriors. And he, who once conquered death FOR us, always conquers IN us.” Toward the close of his epistle he consoles, with suitable arguments those who had not yet been crowned with martyrdom, but were prepared for it in spirit.

* Epis. 8.

The joy of Cyprian, on account of the faithfulness of the martyrs, was, however, considerably damped by the disorderly conduct, which began to take place in his absence. Those, who had suffered tortures for Christ, and were on the point of martyrdom, and to whom it was usual to make application for the presentation of petitions, wrote to him and requested, that the consideration of the cases of lapsed Christians might be deferred till the persecution was stopped, and the bishop was restored to his Church. In the mean time, several of these lapsed brethren offered themselves to certain presbyters of Carthage to be received again into communion; and they were actually re-admitted to the Lord's Supper without any just evidence of their repentance.—The bishop dissembled not his displeasure on this occasion: He confessed, he had long borne with these disorders for the sake of peace, till he thought it his duty to bear with them no longer:—He said, “that it was quite unprecedented to transact these things without the consent of the bishop* :—and that,—even in lesser offences, a regular time of penitence was exacted of the members;—a certain course of discipline took place,—they made open confession of their sins, and were re-admitted to communion by the imposition of hands of the bishop and his clergy.”—He directs that the irregular practice might be stopped, till, on his return, every thing should be settled with propriety.

Some of the martyrs themselves, it appears †, acted very inconsiderately in this business, and gave to lapsed persons commendatory papers, conceived in general terms. Cyprian wishes them to express the NAMES of the persons, and to give no such recommendations to any but those, of whose sincere repentance they had some good proof; and even in

* A further confirmation of the antiquity of a limited episcopacy in the Church of Christ.

† Epis. 10.

that case to refer the ultimate cognizance of such matters to the bishop.

Every thing has two handles. Cyprian* has been represented as stretching the episcopal power beyond its due bounds. I see no evidence that he exceeded the powers of his predecessors. A pious care for the good of souls,—not any ambition for the extension of his own authority, seems to influence his mind in these affairs;—but of this, the learned reader must judge for himself, who will take the pains to examine his epistles with attention. Let any man peruse the following letter; and consult his own heart as he goes along, whether it be the language of a tender father of the Church, or of an imperious lord.

CYPRIAN TO THE BRETHREN OF THE LAITY,
GREETING.


I know from my own feelings, dearest Brethren, that you must grieve, and bitterly bewail over the ruins of our people, as I sincerely join with you in sad grief and lamentation for every one of them: I experience the truth of what the blessed Apostle said, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?” And again, “If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” I sympathize and condole with our brethren, who have lapsed through the violence of persecution: It is true, their wounds give me the most acute pain: they absolutely break my heart: but, divine grace can heal them.—Still I think we should not be in a hurry; nor do any thing incautiously and precipitately; lest, while we rashly re-admit them into communion, the divine displeasure be more grievously incurred. The blessed martyrs have written to us, “begging that their petitions in favour of the lapsed may be examined, when the Lord shall vouchsafe peace to us,

* Mosheim—Ecclesiastical History.

we shall be able to return to the Church.”—
 tainly THEN every case shall be examined in
 r own presence and with the concurrence of your
 judgments.—But I hear that some presbyters,
 either mindful of the precepts of the Gospel,—
 considering what the martyrs have written to
 —and also in contempt of the episcopal authority,
 e already begun to communicate with the lapsed,
 to administer the Lord’s Supper to them, in de-
 ce of that legitimate order by which alone re-ad-
 sions are ever to be regulated. For, if in lesser
 lts this discipline should be observed, much more
 ht it in evils, like these, which radically affect the
 ristian profession itself. Our presbyters and dea-
 s are bound to admonish the people in this matter,
 t they may cherish the sheep intrusted to them,
 instruct them in the way of imploring mercy by
 divine rules.—I have too good an opinion of the
 ceable and humble disposition of our people to
 ieve that they would have ventured to take such
 ep, had they not been seduced by the adulatory
 of some of the clergy.

Do you, then, take care of each of them; and,
 your judgment and moderation, according to the
 red precepts, moderate the spirits of the lapsed:
 none pluck off fruit, as yet unripe, with im-
 vident precipitation; let none commit a vessel
 in to the deep, shattered already and leaky, till
 e carefully re-fitted: let none put on his tattered
 ment, till he see it thoroughly repaired.—I beseech
 EM also to attend to this advice, and to expect
 return;—that when we shall come to you,—by
 mercy of God,—we may, with the concurrence
 other bishops, examine the letters and the petitions
 the martyrs, in the presence of the confessors,
 ording to the will of the Lord.”

It is hence observable, that persons, whose re-
 on had more of form than sincerity, and whose
 sciences were not altogether seared, acted i



same manner then as such do now;—that is, they were more hasty to gain the good will of men than of their Maker. They were ambitious of the favour of the martyrs of those times, who were unquestionably sound and pious Christians; and we shall see soon still stronger proof, that even men of eminent godliness are sometimes too apt to repay, with concessions of a dangerous nature, the professions of respect made to them by ambiguous characters. The Lord's Supper was then, as it is now, made by some an engine of self-righteous formality. And it is in cases of this nature that wholesome Church-discipline is very precious. The danger of false healing justly appeared great to Cyprian, nor can any thing be conceived more proper than the delay which he directed. Yet as the time was protracted to a more distant period than he expected, and as he was afraid that the sickly season of the hot weather might carry off some of the lapsed, he directs, in a subsequent letter*, “that any of the lapsed penitents whose lives might be in danger, should, by such Church officers as were authorized, be re-admitted into the Church.” And he intreats his clergy to cherish the rest of the fallen Christians with care and tenderness.—He observes that the grace of the Lord would not forsake the humble.

His exhortations to his clergy were not without effect. They fell in with his views, and solicited the people to patience, modesty, and real repentance.—They consulted him how they should act in certain critical cases: He referred them to his former letters; and repeated his ideas of the proper season of settling, in general, the concerns of the lapsed; at the same time he urged the indecency of some persons in expecting a re-admission into the Church before the return of those who were in exile, and were stripped of all their goods for the sake of the Gospel. “But, if they are in such excessive hurry,” said the

* Epis. 12.

bishop, "it is in their own power to obtain even more than they desire. The battle is not yet over; the conflict is daily carrying on. If they cordially repent, and the fire of divine faith burns in their breasts, he who cannot brook a delay, may, if he please, be crowned with martyrdom."

The African prelate was ever studious of preserving an intimate connexion with the Roman Church, where still the persecution raged and prevented the election of a successor to Fabian.

The next epistle is employed in giving them an account of his proceedings.

The bold neglect of discipline in Carthage proved a source of vexation to his mind in addition to his other trials, and called forth all the patience, tenderness, and fortitude of which he was possessed.—Lucian, a confessor of Christ, sincere and fervent in faith, but injudicious, and too little acquainted with Christian precepts, undertook, in the name of the collective body of the confessors, to re-admit into communion all the lapsed who had applied to them*; and he wrote a very concise letter to Cyprian, in which he desires him to inform the rest of the bishops of what they had done, and expresses a wish that he may acquiesce in the views of the martyrs.—It cannot be denied,—that, on the one hand, a superstitious veneration for the character of a martyr and a confessor had grown up among these Africans;—and that, on the other,—those, who had suffered for Christ † in persecution, were apt to be elated with spiritual pride, and to assume an authority which by no means belonged to them;—so dangerous a thing is it to be unacquainted with Satan's devices,—and so prone in all ages are even professors of true religion to walk in the steps of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram‡.

Cyprian sent the copy of this letter to his clergy at Carthage; and prefaced his observations on it, in the following pointed manner: "TO THIS MAN

* Epis. 17.

† Epis. 18.

‡ See Numbers, xvi.

WILL I LOOK, saith the Lord, EVEN TO HIM THAT IS POOR AND OF A CONTRITE SPIRIT, AND THAT TREMBLETH AT MY WORD. This character becomes us all, particularly those who have fallen, that they may appear before the Lord humble and penitent indeed." He then added,—“ that the bishops, his brethren, had agreed with him in opinion to defer the consideration of the cases of the lapsed to a council to be held by them in general, after that it should have pleased God to restore peace to his Church ;”—and he urged them “ to support these views.” He sent them, at the same time, a copy of a correspondence between Caldonius, an African bishop, and himself.

It is not known in what place Caldonius lived ; but he, like Cyprian, was very cautious in restoring the lapsed to communion. Some, however, of his Church, having apostatized by sacrificing to the pagan gods, were called to a second trial ; when they recovered their ground ; and, in consequence, were driven into banishment and stripped of their property. Caldonius expressed his opinion that such should be re-admitted. Felix, a presbyter, his wife Victoria, and one Lucian, thus lost their possessions, which were forfeited to the Imperial treasury. A woman, also, named Bona, who was dragged by her pagan husband to sacrifice, was, while they held her hands, compelled to a seeming compliance, but she fully cleared her integrity by saying, “ I did it not,—YE have done it.” She also was banished. Caldonius having stated the facts and given his own opinion, asks the advice of Cyprian, who acquiesces in his judgment ; and adds, that he wished all the lapsed, who then caused him so much affliction, were disposed to retrieve their Christian character by these methods, rather than to increase their fault by pride and insolence*.

A confessor, named Celerinus, who lived in some

* Epis. 18. 19.

HISTORY OF CYPRIAN.

part of Africa,—most probably in banishment,—was much grieved on account of the apostasy of his two sisters, Numeria and Candina. He wept night and day in sackcloth and ashes on their account; and, hearing of Lucian still being in prison and reserved for martyrdom at Carthage, he wrote to him to intreat that either he himself or any of his suffering brethren,—particularly, whosoever should first be called to martyrdom,—would restore them to the Church. He begs the same favour for Etcusa also; who, though she had not sacrificed, had given money to be excused from the act*. He assures Lucian of the sincerity of their repentance; and says, it was evidenced by their kindness and assiduity in attending on the suffering brethren. He, manifestly, attributes too much to the character of martyrs, in affirming, that “because they were friends and witnesses of Christ, they had therefore a power of indulging all requests of this sort.” This letter and the answer of Lucian contain a mixture of good and evil: they exhibit true grace tarnished with pitiable ignorance and superstition. Both Celerinus and Lucian were, doubtless, good men;—but we are more disposed to make candid allowances for the defects of our own age than for those of preceding times.

The conduct of Lucian affords a memorable and lamentable instance of the weakness of human nature even in a regenerate spirit. His answer to Celerinus† displays the most consummate fortitude,—and this,—as far as appears—grounded, in the main, on the true faith and love of Christ. The existence of a deplorable and subtile spirit of pride, in some degree, is, perhaps, not to be denied; but this holy man was certainly not aware of the alloy.—He describes himself and his companions as shut up and pressed together excessively close in two small cells, and also greatly suffering from hunger, thirst,

* Epis. 20.

† Epis. 21.

and intolerable heat. He mentions a number of them as already killed in prison ; and adds that, in a few days, he himself must expire. “ For five days,” says he, “ we have received very little bread ; and the water is apportioned to us by measure.”—Such were the sufferings of this persecution.—Lucian speaks of all this in a cool, and most unaffected manner ;—like one, whose mind was lifted up above the world and its utmost malice, and patiently expected a blessed immortality. As to the petition of Celerinus in favour of his sisters, he informs him that Paul the martyr, who had lately suffered, had visited him WHILE YET IN THE BODY, and had said,—“ Lucian, I say to thee before Christ, that if any person after my decease beg of you to be restored to the Church, do you, in my name, grant his request.” Lucian extends this generosity to the greatest height ; and refers him to the general letter, which he had already written in behalf of the lapsed. Yet he owns, they ought to explain their cause before the bishop, and make a confession. It is very plain, however, that he attributes, in this matter, a sort of superior dignity to Paul, to himself, and to the other martyrs : and, no doubt, the vain-glory of martyrdom was much augmented by the excessive regard which now began to be shown to sufferers.—These and similar facts constrain the reluctant historian to acknowledge, that the corruptions of superstition, in giving immoderate honour to saints and martyrs, which afterwards, through Satan’s artifice and delusion, grew to the enormous pitch of idolatry itself, had ALREADY entered the Church, and contaminated the simplicity and the purity of Christian faith and dependence. Yet this concession,—it must be remembered,—implies no suspicion of hypocrisy either in the martyr or in their admirers. This same Lucian was a man of true, of substantial piety.—He wept and lamented exceedingly on account of the lapsed women ;

and had the fear of God constantly before his eyes. C
Probably, he was not very judicious: his letter is
confused and perplexed beyond measure; nor is it
now easy to say, how far the obscurity is to be
ascribed to the want of a clear understanding, or to
his very distressed circumstances, or to the corrup-
tion of the text.

It is evident that a spirit extremely dangerous to
the cause of piety, humility, and wholesome disci-
pline, was spreading fast in the African Church.
Celerinus himself, who had been a confessor*, owns
that the cause of his sister had been heard by the
clergy of her Church,—at that time it seems, des-
titute of a bishop;—who had deferred the settlement
of it till the appointment of the chief pastor;—but
the precipitation of men would brook no delay.

The eyes of all prudent and more discerning per-
sons in the Church were fixed on the bishop of
Carthage in this emergency. The danger of the loss
of the Gospel itself, by substituting a dependence on
saints instead of Christ Jesus, forcibly struck his
mind. His connexion with the Roman clergy, and
the superior regard to discipline which there prevail-
ed, was of some service on the occasion; and, in his
correspondence with them†, he compares the im-
moderate assuming conduct of Lucian, with the
modesty of the martyrs Mappalicus and Saturninus,
who had abstained from such practices: The former
had written only in behalf of his own mother and
sister; and the latter, who had been tortured and
imprisoned, had yet sent out no letters whatever of
this kind. Lucian, he complains, every where
furnished the lapsed with letters testimonial for
their reception into the Church, written with his

* By a confessor, in the language of those times, we are
always to understand a person who has publicly professed or
confessed himself to be a Christian, when called upon by the
heathens to sacrifice to their gods, or otherwise to worship them.

† Epis. 22.

own hand in the name of Paul while alive, continued to furnish them after his death, and declared that that martyr had directed him to do so ;—though he should have known, says Cyprian, that he ought to obey the Lord rather than his fellow-servant.

A young person, named Aurelius, who had suffered torments, was seized with the same vanity, but was unable to write ; and Lucian wrote many papers in his name.

Cyprian complains of the odium thus incurred by the bishops. In some cities, he takes notice how the multitude had forced the bishops to re-admit the lapsed ; but he blames those rulers of the Church for want of faith and Christian constancy. In his own diocese he had occasion for all his fortitude. Some, who were formerly turbulent, were now much more so, and insisted on being speedily re-admitted. He observes that baptism is performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; and that remission of past sins is then received ; and then he complains that the name of Paul, in effect, is inserted in the place of the Trinity. He applies, on this occasion, St. Paul's well-known holy execration denounced in the beginning of the Epistle to the Galatians. He owns his obligation to Rome for the letters of their clergy, which were well calculated to withstand these abuses.

He * wrote a congratulatory letter to the confessors Moyses and Maximus, whose faith and zeal, united with modesty and with the strictest attention to discipline, he had formerly much commended ; and he now thanks them for the epistolary advice, which they had given to the African confessors. In their answer † they appear transported with holy joy, and elevated with the heavenly prospects before them. They quote the New Testament Scriptures relative ‡ to these things ; and express such strength of

* Epis. 24.

† Epis. 25.

‡ Matt. v. 10, 11. Luke vi. 23. Matt. x. 18. Rom. viii. 35.

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faith, hope, and charity, as demonstrates the real power of divine grace to have been possessed by them in a very eminent manner. Their love of the divine word and of just discipline appears no less great than their zeal and ardour for martyrdom. They observe how deeply and how widely spread the evil of defection had been ; and they conclude with very just observations on the right method of treating the lapsed, in perfect agreement with Cyprian. Greatness of mind, a high sense of the importance of order, a heavenly warmth of temper, and an accuracy of judgment, are equally and abundantly evident in this epistle :—Such endowments existing in just proportion prove that the work of the Holy Spirit was very sound in these excellent men.

Cyprian now wrote to the lapsed themselves ; and rebuked the precipitation of some, and exposed the injustice of their claims, since they acted as if they took to themselves the whole title of the Church : he commended the modesty of others, who refused to take advantage of the indiscreet recommendation of the martyrs, and who wrote to him in the language of penitents ;—whence it appears that the folly of the lapsed was by no means universal *.

Gaius Diddensis, one of the presbyters of Cyprian, undertook, along with his deacon, against the sense of the rest of the clergy, to communicate with the lapsed. Repeated admonitions availed not to a reformation. As the bishop was sensible that the common people, for whose salvation he was solicitous, were deceived by these things, he commends his clergy for refusing communion with so obstinate and irregular a presbyter and deacon.—He again † intimates his intention of judging all things in full council upon his return ; and intreats them to co-operate, in the mean time, with his views in the maintenance of discipline. In writing again to the Roman clergy, he declares his determination of

* Epis. 26.

† Epis. 27.

acting as God had directed his ministers in the Gospel, if the contumacious were not reformed by his and by their admonitions*.

The Roman clergy condole affectionately with Cyprian;—"Our sorrow," say they, "is doubled, because you have no rest from these pressing difficulties of the persecution; and because the immoderate petulance of the lapsed has proceeded to the height of arrogance. But, though these things have grievously afflicted our spirits; yet your firmness and evangelical strictness of discipline have moderated the load of vexation: You have both restrained the wickedness of certain persons; and also, by exhorting them to repentance, have shown them the wholesome way to salvation.—We are astonished that they should proceed to such lengths, in a time so mournful, so unseasonable as the present;—that they should not so much as ASK for re-communication with the Church; but claim it as a right;—and even affirm that they are already forgiven in heaven. Never cease, brother,—in your love of souls,—to moderate and restrain these violent spirits; and to offer the medicine of truth to the erroneous, though the inclination of the sick be often opposite to the prudent industry of the physician. These wounds of the lapsed are fresh, and produce considerable tumours; but we feel assured, that, in process of time, their heat and violence will subside;—and the patients themselves will then be thankful for that delay, which was absolutely necessary for a wholesome cure, provided there be none to arm them with weapons against themselves, and, by perverse instructions, to demand for them the deadly poison of an overhasty restoration: for we cannot think that they would all † have dared to have claimed their admission so petulantly, without the encouragement of some persons of ecclesiastical influence. We know the faith,

* Epis. 28.

† They must have understood that by much the major part at least of the lapsed were guilty of this evil.

the good order, the humility of the Carthaginian Church;—whence we have been surprised in noticing certain harsh reflections made against you in a certain epistle, when we have formerly had repeated proof of your mutual charity.”

They proceed to give the most wholesome advice to the lapsed; and in truth, the whole conduct of the Roman clergy, at this season, reflects the highest honour on their wisdom and their affection; and affords the most pleasing proofs of the good state of that church at that time. The same can by no means be said of Cyprian's:—they were,—as we have seen,—a declining people before his appointment to the See; and the scourge of persecution produced vast numbers of apostates.—In those days of discipline, the lapsed, by their eagerness for re-admission, showed the same dispositions of selfishness and of pride, which, in our times, are evinced by persons wishing to hear nothing but comfort preached to them,—by finding fault with ministers who dare not speak false peace;—and by unsoundly healing themselves. We are perfectly lax in point of discipline:—Who regards its menaces against the disorderly?—With the first Christians this was an awful concern.—The same depravity of nature seems now to work on corrupt minds in another way; but so as still to exercise the patience and fortitude of godly ministers, who, by persevering in their duty, and not giving way to the unreasonable humours of their people in things of importance, will find, in the end, a wholesome issue even with many of their most unpromising and froward hearers.

An African, named Privatus, who had left his country and travelled to Rome, solicited to be there received as a Christian. Cyprian had mentioned him to the Roman clergy, and pointed out his real and dangerous character. In the close of this admirable *letter they inform him that, before they

* Epis. 29.

had received his cautionary letters, they had detected the impostor. At the same time they lay down a golden maxim, “that we all ought to watch for the body of the whole Church, diffused through various provinces.”—It was this unity and uniformity of the Christian Church, which hitherto had preserved it, under God, from the infection of heresies. None of these were yet able to mix themselves with the “body of Christ* :” and the Church,—instead of being broken into small handfuls of distinct sets of persons, all glorying in having something peculiarly excellent, and prone to despise their neighbours,—as yet knew no other name than that of CHRISTIAN: numbers and diversity of place alone prevented their assembling all together; for they were one people. In Italy and Africa the union at this time appears very salubrious: and the vigorous spirit and sound understanding of Cyprian was enabled to apply the solid graces of the Roman Church as medicinal for the reformation of his own disordered flock.

The Roman clergy, in a †second letter, take notice of St. Paul’s eulogium of their Church in the beginning of his epistle;—“that their faith was spoken of through the whole world,” and they express their desire of treading in the steps of their Christian predecessors. They mention the cases of ‡ Libellatici, which were two-fold; 1st, Of those who delivered in written testimonials to heathen magistrates, in which they abjured the Gospel; and who, at the same time, by paying money, obtained the privilege of not sacrificing to the gods.—2dly, Of those who procured friends to do these same things for them. Both

* Coloss. i. 24. His body’s sake, which is the Church.

† Epis. 80.

‡ So called from libellus,—which here means a concise written document, signed by the person whom it concerned, and containing an account of his religion: In many cases, it was only signed by some creditable and well-known friends.—An evasive contrivance—for the purpose of quieting insincere consciences, not yet quite hardened!

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kinds,—these last, as well as those who had actually sacrificed, were censured by the Roman clergy as lapsed persons. They mention likewise the letters sent by the Roman confessors into Africa to the same purport, and express their joy on account of the consistency of their conduct in matters of discipline, with their sufferings for the faith. They declare their agreement in opinion with Cyprian,—to defer the settlement of these affairs till some general measure could be planned for this purpose, after peace should be restored. “Behold,” say they, “almost the whole world is laid waste:—Fragments of the fallen lie in every place:—With one and the same counsel, with unanimous prayers and tears, let us,—who seem hitherto to have escaped the ruins of this visitation, as well as those, who have not stood entirely faithful during the persecution, intreat the Divine Majesty, and beg peace in the name of the whole Church: let us cherish, guard, and arm one another with mutual prayers: let us supplicate for the lapsed, that they may be raised: let us pray for those who stand, that they may not be tempted to their ruin; let us pray also, that those, who have fallen, may become sensible of the greatness of the crime, and may have the wisdom not to wish for a crude and momentary medicine, and that they may not disturb the yet fluctuating state of the Church,—lest they should appear to aggravate our distresses by exciting INTERNALLY seditious and inflammatory commotions.—Let them knock at the doors, but not break them.—Let them go to the threshold of the Church, but not leap over it. Let them watch at the gates of the heavenly camp, but with that modesty which becomes those who remember they have been deserters. Let them arm themselves indeed with the weapons of humility, and resume that shield of faith which they dropped through the fear of death; but so that they may be armed

against the devil,—not against that very Church, which laments over their fall.”

The want of a bishop at Rome was an additional reason for delay. They speak of certain bishops who lived in their neighbourhood, and also of others, who, through the flame of persecution, had fled to them from distant provinces,—who all concurred in the same views.

There was a very young man, named Aurelius, whom Cyprian speaks of as greatly excelling in the graces of Christianity. He had twice undergone the rage of persecution for the sake of Christ:—Banishment was his first punishment, and torture the second. The bishop had ordained this youth a reader in the Church of Carthage; and he apologizes on account of the peculiar circumstances of the case and of the times, for his not having previously consulted his presbyters and deacons. He beseeches them to pray, that both their bishop and good Aurelius may be restored to the exercise of their respective functions.—I cannot but hence observe, how exact and orderly the ideas of ordination were in those times.—It is not to the advantage of godliness among us, that persons can now be introduced to very high offices in the ministry without much previous trial, ceremony, or difficulty*.

Celerinus was also ordained a reader by the same † authority. However weak in judgment he may appear from the transactions between him and Lucian already stated, the man suffered with great zeal for the sake of Christ. The very beginning of the persecution found him a ready combatant. For nineteen days he had remained in prison fettered and starved; but he persevered and escaped at length without martyrdom. His grandfather and two of his uncles had suffered for Christ, and their anniversaries were celebrated by the Church.

* Epis. 33.

† Epis. 34.

It seems, that Cyprian thought proper to reward with honourable establishments in the Church those who had suffered with the greatest faithfulness in the persecution, which was now drawing to a close. Numidicus was advanced to the office of presbyter. He had attended* a great number of martyrs who were murdered, partly with stones, and partly by fire. His wife, sticking close by his side, was burnt to death with the rest: He himself, half burnt, buried with stones, and left for dead, was found afterwards by his daughter; and, through her care, he recovered. Probably, this last case was the effect of the tumultuary rage of a persecuting populace: The ferocity of many in those times did not permit them to wait for legal orders.—Who can tell the number of Christian sufferers, which this mode of oppression must have added to the list of martyrs?

Amidst all these cares the charity and diligence of Cyprian towards his flock were unremitted. The reader who loves the annals of genuine and active godliness will not be wearied in seeing still fresh proofs of it in extracts of two letters to his clergy†.

“Dear brethren, I salute you: By the grace of God, I am still safe; and I wish to come soon to you;—that our mutual desire, and that of all the brethren, may be gratified. Whenever, on the settlement of your affairs, you shall write to me that I ought to come, or, if the Lord should condescend to make it plain to me before, then I will come to you; for where can I have more happiness and joy, than there, where God appointed me both first to become a believer, and also to grow in faith? I beseech you, take diligent care of the widows, of the sick, and of all the poor; and supply also strangers, if any be indigent, with what is needful for them, out of my proper portion, which I left with Rogatian the presbyter. And lest that should,

* Epis. 35.

† Epis. 36, 37.

by this time, be all spent, I have sent by Naricus the Acolyth*, another sum of money to the same presbyter, that you may the more readily and largely supply the distressed.

“Though you have been frequently admonished by my letters to show all care for those, who have gloriously confessed the Lord, and are in prison, yet I must repeatedly intreat your attention to the same thing. I wish circumstances would permit my presence among you: With the greatest pleasure and readiness would I discharge these solemn duties of love and affection towards our brethren. But—Do you represent me.—A decent care for the interment, not only of those who died in torture, but also of such as died under the pressures of confinement, is necessary. For, whoever hath submitted himself to torture and to death, under the eye of God, hath already suffered all that God would have him to suffer.—Mark also the days in which they depart this life, that we may celebrate their commemoration among the memorials of the martyrs:—though our most faithful and devoted friend Tertullus,—who agreeably to his usual exactness and care, attends to their obsequies,—hath written, still writes to me, and signifies the days in which the blessed martyrs are transmitted to immortality.—Their memorials are here celebrated, and I hope shortly, under Divine Providence, to be able to celebrate them with you. Let not your care and diligence be wanting for the poor, who have stood firm in the faith, and have fought with us in the Christian warfare. Our affectionate care and attention to them are the more requisite, because neither their poverty nor persecution have driven them from the love of Christ.”

Every one knows into what idolatry these commemorations of martyrs afterwards degenerated.—But I observe few or no signs of it in the days of Cyprian.

* An inferior officer of the Church, signifying an attendant.

In addition to other evils, the providence of God now thought fit to exercise the mind of Cyprian with one of the most distressing calamities, which can happen to a lover of peace and charity,—the rise of a schism.

There* existed in the Church of Carthage a person of a very exceptionable character, named Felicissimus, who had long been a secret enemy of the bishop. By the same artifices and blandishments which seditious persons make use of in all ages, this man had enticed some of the flock to himself; and he held communion with them on a certain mountain. Among these and in their neighbourhood, there arrived several discreet brethren, who were authorized by Cyprian to discharge the debts of poor Christians; and to furnish them with small sums of money to begin business again; and also to make a report of their ages, conditions, and qualities, that he might select such of them for ecclesiastical offices, as should be judged properly qualified. Felicissimus opposed and thwarted both these designs. Several of the poor, who came first to be relieved, were threatened by him with imperious severity, because they refused to communicate on the mountain. This man growing more insolent, and taking advantage of Cyprian's absence, whose return he speedily expected, because the persecution had nearly ceased at Carthage, raised an opposition against the bishop in FORM,—found means to unite a considerable party to himself,—and threatened all those persons, who did not choose to partake in the sedition.—Among other crimes, this sower of discord had been guilty of adultery; and he now saw no method of preventing an infamous excommunication, but that of setting up himself as a leader.—His second in this odious business was named Augendus; who did his utmost to promote the same views.—Cyprian, by letter, expressed his vehement sorrow on account of these

Account
of Felicis-
simus.

* Epis. 38.

evils, promised to take full cognizance of them on his return, and in the mean time he wrote to his clergy to suspend from communion Felicissimus and his abettors.—His clergy wrote to him in answer, that they had suspended the chiefs of the faction accordingly*.

In the mean time there were not wanting upright and zealous ministers, who instructed the people at Carthage. Among these were distinguished Britius the presbyter, also Rogatian and Numidicus, confessors ; and some deacons of real godliness. These warned their flocks of the evils of schism, and endeavoured to preserve peace and unity, and to recover the lapsed by wholesome methods. In addition to their labours, Cyprian now wrote to the people themselves†. “ For,” says he, “ the malice and perfidy of some presbyters hath effected, that I should not be able to come to you before Easter‡. But the source of the faction of Felicissimus is now discovered, and we are acquainted with the foundation on which it stands. His followers encourage certain confessors, that they should not harmonize with their bishop, nor observe ecclesiastical discipline faithfully and modestly. And as if it were too little for them to have corrupted the minds of confessors, and to have armed them against their pastor, and to have stained the glory of their confession, they turned themselves to poison the spirits of the lapsed, to keep them from the great duty of constant prayer, and to invite them to an unsound and dangerous re-admission. But I beseech you, brethren, watch against the snares of the devil: Be on your guard and ‘ work out your own salvation :’ this is a second and a different sort of persecution and temptation. The five seditious presbyters may be justly compared to the five pagan rulers, who lately, in conjunction with

* Epis. 39.

† Epis. 40.

‡ In what way they hindered his arriving sooner will appear afterwards.

the magistrates, published some plausible arguments with a view of subverting souls. The same method is now tried, for the ruin of your souls, by the five presbyters with Felicissimus at their head: They teach you,—that you need not petition;—that he who hath denied Christ, may cease to supplicate the same Christ whom he hath denied;—that repentance is not necessary;—and in short, that every thing should be conducted in a novel manner, and contrary to the rules of the Gospel.

“My banishment of two years, and my mournful separation from your presence; my constant grief and perpetual lamentation; and my tears flowing day and night, because the pastor whom you chose with so much love and zeal could not salute nor embrace you,—all this, it seems, was not a sufficient accumulation of sorrow.—To my distressed and exhausted spirit a still greater evil must be added,—that in so great a solicitude I cannot, with propriety, come over to you. The threats and snares of the perfidious obligeme to use caution; lest, on my arrival, the tumults should increase; and lest I myself, the bishop, who ought to provide in all things for peace and tranquillity, should seem to have afforded matter for sedition, and again to exasperate the miseries of the persecution. Most dear brethren, I beseech you do not give rash credit to the pernicious representations of those who put darkness for light: They speak, but not from the word of the Lord: They, who are themselves separated from the Church, promise to restore the lapsed.

“There is one God, one Christ, one Church. Depart, I pray you, far from these men, and avoid their discourse, as a plague and pestilence. They hinder your prayers and tears; by affording you false consolations. Acquiesce, I beseech you, in my counsel: I pray daily for you, and desire you to be restored to the Church by the grace of the Lord.—Join your prayers and tears with mine. But, if any per-

shall despise repentance, and betake himself to Felicissimus and to his faction, let him know, that his re-admission into the Church will be impracticable."

It is not possible, by a few extracts, to give a perfect idea of the glowing charity, which reigned in Cyprian's breast on this occasion. Whoever has attended to the imbecility of human nature, ever prone to consult ease, to humour selfish feelings, and to admit flattery, will see the difficult trials of patience, which faithful pastors, in all ages, have endured from the insidious arts of those who would heal the wounds of people falsely.—Uncharitable—and, imperious—are the usual epithets with which they are aspersed on account of their faithfulness.—But "Wisdom is justified of her children."

Character
of Novatus.

But there was also another character, who was a primary agent in these disagreeable scenes,—Novatus, a presbyter of Carthage, a man extremely scandalous and immoral *. His domestic crimes had been so notorious as to render him not only no longer fit to be a minister, but even unworthy to be received into lay-communion. The examination of his conduct was about to take place, when the breaking out of the persecution by Decius prevented it. He it was, who supported and cherished the views of Felicissimus and of the rest; and he appears, by his address and capacity, to have been extremely well qualified to produce much mischief in the Church. He could do it no service; because he was absolutely devoid both of honesty and conscience.—Felicissimus himself, though at first the ostensible leader of the congregation on the mountain, gave way afterwards to one of the five presbyters, named Fortunatus, who was constituted bishop in opposition to Cyprian. Most of the five had been already branded with infamy for immoralities. Yet so deep is the corruption of human nature—that such charac-

* Epis. 49.

ters usually find advocates, even where the light of the Gospel shines, and where there exist pastors of eminent sanctity. The fact is, pastors of this last description cause numerous enemies to themselves by irritating the corruptions of wicked men, which they constantly do by refusing to speak peace where there is no peace.—It is no slight proof of the strength of these evils, that even a persecution the most dreadful yet recorded in the annals of the Church; did not perfectly unite professors of Christianity in love. The pious reader, will, hence, infer the necessity, which called for so severe a scourge to the Church; and will also remark the advantages thence accruing to the really faithful; either by happily removing them to rest out of a world of sin and vanity, or by promoting their sanctification, if their pilgrimage were prolonged.

Novatus, either unwilling to face the bishop of Carthage, or desirous to extend the mischiefs of schism, passed the sea and came to Rome. There he connected himself with a priest, named Novatian, a friend of the confessor Moses, who has been already mentioned, and whose sufferings at Rome were of a tedious nature. Novatus had the address and management to effect the separation of Novatian from the Church.—Moses renounced all intercourse with his former friend and acquaintance on account of this conduct; and soon after died in prison, where he had been confined nearly a year. Doubtless, he entered into eternal glory at length, having left the evidence of modesty and peaceableness, in addition to his other more splendid virtues, as testimonies of his love to the Lord Jesus.

Account of
Novatian.

Novatus found the religious ideas of his new associate and partner arranged in extreme opposition to his own. Novatian had been a Stoic before he was a Christian; and he still retained the rigour of the sect to such a degree, that he disapproved of receiving those into the Church who once had lapsed, though they gave the sincerest marks of repentance.

CHAP.
IX.

Full of these unwarranted severities, he exclaimed against the wise and well-tempered lenity of the Roman clergy in receiving penitents. Many of the clergy of Rome, who were still in prison for the faith;—and among these Maximus and others, to whom Cyprian had formerly written,—were seduced by this apparent zeal for Church-discipline; and they joined Novatian. His African tutor, with astonishing inconsistency, after having stirred up a general indignation in his own country and against his own bishop on account of severity to the lapsed, now supported a party who complained of too much lenity at Rome. It is hard to say which of the two extremes is the worse:—Novatus defended both within the compass of two years;—and with equal pertinacity.

The Roman clergy thought it high time to stem the torrent. They had, for sixteen months *, with singular piety and fortitude governed the Church during one of its most stormy seasons. Schism was now added to persecution: The necessity of choosing a bishop grew more and more urgent; yet a bishop of Rome must, of course, be in the most imminent danger of martyrdom;—for Decius threatened all bishops with great haughtiness and asperity. Sixteen of them happened to be then at Rome, and these ordained Cornelius as the successor of Fabian. He was very unwilling to accept the office; but the people, who were present, approved of his ordination; and no step was to be neglected, which might be useful in withstanding the growing schism.—The life of Cornelius appears to have been worthy of the Gospel: Novatian, however, not only vented many calumnies against him, but also contrived, in a very irregular manner †, to be elected bishop in opposition.

e first
senters.

Thus was formed the first body of Christians,

* Fleury, B. 6.

† See in Euseb. B. 6. Cornelius's letter concerning Novatian, whom Eusebius, by mistake, confounds with Novatus.

who, in modern language, may be called DISSENTERS; that is, men, who separate from the general Church, not on grounds of DOCTRINE, but of DISCIPLINE. The Novatianists held no opinions contrary to the faith of the Gospel. It is certain from some writings of Novatian extant*, that their leader was sound in the doctrine of the Trinity. But the confessors, whom his pretensions to superior† purity had seduced, returned afterwards to the communion of Cornelius, and mourned over their own credulity. In a letter of Cornelius to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, a few circumstances are occasionally mentioned, from which an idea of the state of the Church of Rome, at that time, may be collected‡. There were under the bishop forty-six priests, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolyths, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and porters, and upwards of fifteen hundred widows, and infirm or disabled persons.—“The number of the laity was,” says he, “innumerable.”—I don’t know so authentic a memorial of the number of the Christians in those times.

In this letter he charges Novatian,—perhaps without sufficient warrant,—with having denied himself to be a priest during the heat of the persecution, and with obliging his separatists, when he administered to them the Lord’s Supper, to swear to adhere to himself.—The party, however, at Rome daily lost ground: Nicostratus the deacon was among the very few persons of note there, who, after being seduced by the arts of Novatian, did not return into communion and peace with Cornelius.—Conscious of scandalous crimes§, this schismatic fled from Rome into Africa;—whither Novatus himself also returned; and there the Novatians found many adherents, and are said to have elected for themselves, as a sort of

* See Waterland’s Importance of the Trinity.

† Epis. 48 and 49.

‡ About the middle of the third century.

§ The Novatians called themselves Cathari, pure.

counter-bishop, a presbyter, named **Maximus**, who had been lately sent as deputy from Rome, by Novatian, to inform Cyprian of the new election * in opposition to that of Cornelius.—This same deputy, Cyprian had rejected from communion.

It would not have been worth while to have detailed these events so distinctly, but for the purpose of marking the symptoms of declension in the Church,—the unity of which was now broken for the first time : for it ought not to be concluded that all the Novatians were men void of the faith and love of Jesus. The artifices of Satan also, in pushing forward opposite extremes, are worthy of notice; The skilful tempter tries both the lax and the severe method of discipline. The former he finds more suitable to the state of Christianity in our times, but it could gain no solid footing in the third century. The Novatian schism stood at last on the ground of excessive severity ;—a certain proof of the strictness of the ecclesiastical government then fashionable among Christians, and, of course, of great purity of life and doctrine having been prevalent among them : To refuse the re-admission of penitents was a dangerous instance of pharisaical pride : but, in justice to Novatian, it ought to be mentioned, that he advised the exhorting of the lapsed to repentance, though he thought that they should then be left to the judgment of God. On the same plan he also condemned second marriages :—Extreme austerity and superstition were growing evils in this century; and they were cherished by false philosophy.

At length, Cyprian ventured out of his retreat and returned to Carthage. In what manner he there conducted himself, shall be the subject of the next chapter.

* The election of Novatian.

CYPRIAN'S SETTLEMENT OF HIS CHURCH AFTER
HIS RETURN, AND THE HISTORY OF THE
WESTERN CHURCH TILL THE PERSECUTION
UNDER GALLUS.

THE prudence of Cyprian had been so remarkable during the whole of the persecution of Decius, that we may fairly conclude he had ceased to apprehend any personal danger when he appeared again in public at Carthage. In fact, it was not the cessation of malice, but the distraction of public affairs, which put an end to this persecution. Decius, on account of the incursion of the Goths, was obliged to leave Rome; and God gave a respite to his servants, while men of the world were wholly taken up with resisting or mourning under their secular calamities.—After Easter a council was held at Carthage, and the eyes of Christians were turned toward it: The Church was in a very confused state; and some settlement of it was expected under the auspices of Cyprian and the other bishops of Africa. At first, a short delay was occasioned on account of doubts which arose respecting the validity of the election of Cornelius*. But an exact information of the circumstances laid open the truth: The regularity of his appointment, and the violation of order in the schismatical ordination of Novatian, by some persons who were in a state of intoxication, appeared so clearly, that no room for hesitation was left: Novatian was rejected in the African synod;—Felicissimus, with his five presbyters, was condemned; and Cornelius was owned as legitimate bishop of Rome.—And now the case of the lapsed, which had given so much disquietude, and which Cyprian had so often promised to settle in full council, was finally

* See Cornelius's letter in Euseb.

CHAP.
X.

determined :—and with men, who feared God, it was—
no hard thing to adjust a due medium.—A proper
temperature was used between the precipitation of
the lapsed and the stoical severity of Novatian.
Hence, tried penitents were restored, and the case
of dubious characters was deferred ; and yet every
method of Christian charity was used to bring about
and facilitate their repentance and re-admission.

Fortunatus preserved still a schismatical assembly.
But both this bishop and his flock shrunk soon into
insignificance. The Christian authority of Cyprian
was restored. The Novatian party alone remained a
long time after, in Africa and elsewhere, numerous
enough, to continue a distinct body of professing
Christians. The very little satisfactory light, which
Christian annals afford concerning these Dissenters,
shall be given in its place. And, as I am convinced
that the Almighty has not limited his creatures to
any particular and strictly defined modes of Church
government, I cannot be under much temptation to
partiality.—The laws of historical truth have obliged
me to state facts which prove their secession to have
been unjustifiable ; but that circumstance does not
render it impossible that the Spirit of God might be
with some of this people during their continuance as
a distinct body of Christians.

Thus did it please God to make use of the vigour
and perseverance of Cyprian in recovering the
Church of Carthage from a state of most deplorable
declension. First, she had lost her purity and piety
to a very alarming degree ; then, she was torn with
persecution, and sifted by the storm so much that
the greatest part of her professors apostatized ; and
lastly, she was convulsed by schisms, through men's
unwillingness to submit to the rules of God's own
word in wholesome discipline and sincere repentance.
On Cyprian's return, however, a new train of regu-
lation was established by the council of Carthage ;
and unity was restored in a great measure : The

accounts of the succeeding transactions are imperfect; but there is great reason to believe that the Church of God was much recovered in these parts.

Decius lost his life in battle in the year two hundred and fifty-one, after having reigned thirty months.—A prince—neither deficient in abilities nor in moral virtues, but distinguished, during this whole period, by the most cruel persecution of the Church of God; he appears to have been bent on its ruin; but was stopped in his career by an overruling Providence.

Decius
slain,
A. D.
251.

The Church was now allowed peace for a little time under Gallus, the successor of Decius.

There remain a few circumstances to be observed, which attended this persecution in the West, before we proceed to relate its effects in the Eastern Church.

Cyprian, zealous for the unity of the Church, informed Cornelius*, that certain persons came to Carthage from Novatian, who insisted on being heard as to some charges which they had to produce against Cornelius:—But,—that as sufficient and ample testimony had already been given in favour of Cornelius,—as a prudent delay had also been made,—and as the sense of the Church of Rome had been authentically exhibited, any further audience of the NOVATIANS had been refused.—These, he observes, strove then to make a party in Africa; and for this purpose solicited different towns and private houses. The council of Carthage informed them that they ought to desist from their obstinacy, and not to relinquish their mother Church; but to own, that a bishop being once constituted and approved by the testimony and judgment of his colleagues and of the people, another could not be lawfully set up in his room: and, that therefore, if they intended to act peaceably and faithfully,—if they pretended to be the assertors of the Gospel of Christ,—they ought to return to the Church.

* Epis. 41.

Though the ideas contained in this epistle may appear very repugnant to the habits of thinking contracted by many professors of godliness in our days; I see not, I own, on what principles they can be controverted. There is a medium between the despotism of idolatrous Rome and the extreme licentiousness of modern ecclesiastical polity.—Are not peace and unity precious things?—and ought not they to be preserved in the Church if possible?—Then why should not the decided sense of the majority prevail, where that mode of evangelically settling a Church has been usual, and where it is not contrary to the established laws of the country, and lastly, where pastors sound in faith and decorous in manners, have been appointed?—Can it be right for a small number of individuals to dissent—and that, on no better ground, than their own fancy and humour? This is not keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.—Such, however, was the first origin of the Novatian schism.

The author would by no means be understood here, to approach on the right of private judgment; but he laments sincerely, that the evil of separation should have been considered by the Novatians as a trifling matter; and he, further, laments, that a spirit of the same kind should appear to prevail strongly in our own days.—“Does, then, right and wrong,—will any one say,—depend upon numbers? Have not the few as undoubted a right to their own opinions as the many?”—Such questions are often asked,—and with an air of triumph.—But, after all,—whoever denied this right of opinion; this right to think?—It is the right of ACTING according to this right of opinion that is contested.—Let a man, for example, in his private judgment, prefer for his pastor or his bishop some person different from him who has been elected by the majority;—let him publicly show this preference at the time of giving his suffrage;—but let him remember to acquiesce peaceably in the appointment of the person elected; and not endeavour to divide the Church of Christ by placing a rejected candidate or some other favourite at the head of a faction in opposition to the election of,—perhaps,—a truly godly and religious man.

But in all this the author supposes either the *Lex scripta* or the *Lex non scripta* of the country to authorize ecclesiastical appointments by election.

Persons, who have been accustomed to approve the unrestrained and unscriptural manner of conducting religious communities, which now so unhappily prevails; who feel no pity for the Church of Christ, nor care how much her members be torn one from another, and who make no more difficulty of changing their pastors than their workmen; will not enter into the beauty of Cyprian's charitable concern for the unity of the Church. It is evident, union at Rome was as much on his heart as UNION at Carthage, because he considered Christ's BODY as one. He explains* to Cornelius why he was not immediately acknowledged as bishop, and how he was honourably received on full information. He speaks of the Roman schism with horror; he represents the Christian schismatics, as refusing the bosom and the embrace of their mother, and as setting up an adulterous head out of the Church. I attempt not to vindicate expressions which go to the length of a total condemnation of the persons of schismatics: Schism is not so deadly an evil as heresy; nor must we undertake to judge the HEARTS of others. But when all this is allowed,—Does not the zeal of Cyprian call for similar candour?—The mischief, which had just begun to show itself in Rome and Carthage, was then new in the Christian world. Before the time of this able and active prelate, no instance had happened of any separations made from the Church, except in the case of damnable heresies: Slight and tolerable inconveniences had not yet been thought sufficient reasons to justify such violent measures; and, it must be owned, if really good men in all ages had possessed the same conscientious dread of the sin of Schism, it would have fared much better with vital Christianity; and, further, those separations which must of necessity be made, when false worship and false doctrine are prevalent, would have been treated with more respect in the world.

* Epis. 42.

Encouraged with the success of his pacific labours at home, Cyprian endeavoured to heal the breaches of the Roman Christians. He was sensible that the example of the confessors, whom Novatian's appearance of superior piety in discipline had seduced, had occasioned a great defection. He wrote respectfully to his former correspondents, and assured them that the deepest sadness had possessed his breast on their account: he reminds them of the honour of their faithful sufferings: he intreats them to return to the Church; and points out the inconsistency of their glorious confession of Christ with their present irregularity. But so exactly attentive was Cyprian to order, that he first sent the letter to Cornelius, and ordered it to be read to him, and submitted to his consideration before he would suffer it to be sent to the confessors*. With the same cautious charity he explains again to Cornelius some things which had given umbrage to that prelate with respect to the delay of the acknowledgment of his ordination†. These transactions appear to me to belong to my plan; and to be singularly instructive.—The conduct of this African bishop is calculated to admonish Christian ministers in all ages to enlarge their views so as to comprehend the whole Church of Christ; and never to feel assured that they grow in true zeal and true charity, as long as they do not fear the evils of division, and do not labour to preserve peace and unity.

The progress of Christian grace will always be much seen in the just management of matters of this kind.

There is the strongest reason to believe that the authority of Cyprian had a great effect on the minds of Maximus and the other seduced confessors, whose undoubted piety gave the chief support to Novatian's party. But another circumstance happened about the same time, which contributed to open

* Epis. 43, 44.

† Epis. 45.

their eyes effectually. The excessive eagerness of schismatics at Rome defeated their own end: with the view of increasing the Schism, they were fraudulent as to send out frequent letters in the names of these confessors, almost throughout all Churches. Maximus and the rest became acquainted with the fact, and were exceedingly surprised: they owned they knew not a syllable of the contents of these letters: and they heartily desired reunion with the Church. The whole body of the Roman Christians,—and probably, at that time no other Church existed,—sympathized with these confessors both in their seduction and in their recovery. Acclamations of joy and thanksgiving to God burst forth in the assembly. “We confess,” say Maximus and the rest with ingenuous frankness, “our mistake.—We own Cornelius the bishop of the most holy general* Church, chosen by Almighty God and by our Lord; we suffered an imposture: We were circumvented by treachery and a captious plausibility of speech: and though we seem to have had some communication with a schismatic and a heretic†, yet our mind was sincerely with the Church; we knew that there is one God, one Christ, one Lord, whom we have confessed; one Holy Ghost; and that one bishop ought to be in the general Church.” “Should we not,” says Cornelius, “be moved with their profession;—and, by restoring them to the Church, give them the opportunity of acting according to that belief which they have dared to profess before all the world? We have restored Maximus the presbyter to his office:—the rest we have also received with the zealous consent of the people.”

* I choose to translate Cornelius's *Catholicæ* in *Epist.* 46, which gives an account of this transaction, GENERAL rather than CATHOLIC, to distinguish the Church of Christ at large from particular separatists.

† They confound here two terms that ought to be kept distinct. Novatian was a schismatic, but not a heretic.

Cyprian, with his usual animation*, congratulated Cornelius on the event; and describes the happy effect which the example of the confessors had on the minds of the people.—And, I cannot but think that, in modern times, much evil might have been prevented in the Church of Christ, if many excellent men, who have suffered their minds to be harassed by needless and frivolous scruples, had possessed more tenderness of conscience in regard to the question of schism and separation.—“Not one can now be deceived,” says Cyprian, “by the loquacity of a frantic schismatic, since it appears that good and glorious soldiers of Christ could not long be detained out of the Church by perfidy and fallacy.”

The Novatians being baffled at Rome, Novatus and Nicostratus went over to Africa. We have already taken notice of their seditious attempts in those parts. Cornelius†, by letter, warned Cyprian of the probable approach of the schismatics; and certainly, there is a disagreeable harshness of language in this account of his enemies as well as in the fragment of his Epistle preserved by Eusebius.

Of Novatus himself, the bishop of Carthage, who must have thoroughly known him, asserts expressly and circumstantially that he was guilty of horrible crimes, which, in truth, it is neither pleasant to particularize, nor does the plan of this history call for such a detail.—The honest charity of Cyprian requires that this testimony should be admitted. This bishop was as remarkable for moderation as for zeal. He speaks with much sensibility of persons seduced by the arts of the foul impostor; and observes—“Those only will perish, who are wilful in their evils. The rest, says he, the mercy of God the Father will unite with us, and the grace of our Lord Christ, and our patience.” I wish this benevolent spirit had had opportunities of knowing

* Epis. 47.

† Epis. 48.

‡ Epis. 49.

Novatian as perfectly as he knew Novatus. But a Roman, who does not appear ever to have come into Africa at all, could only be made known to him by report.—I shall find a convenient place by and by, in which it may be proper to make such further remarks upon him as the scanty and imperfect materials will supply.—Let the candid reader, however, always bear in mind, that, though Novatus was, doubtless, a very wicked man, though no ground for the separation appears in history, and though there is not the least reason to believe that the Spirit of God had left the general Church to abide with the dissentients, yet the personal character of several of the supporters of the schism might still be excellent.

In answer to a friendly letter of the Roman Confessors*, Cyprian, after congratulating them on their re-union with the Church, and expressing his sincere sorrow for the former defection, delivers his sentiments on the duty of Christians in this point. The flattering idea, which had seduced these good men, was a notion of constituting a Church here on earth exactly pure and perfect.—The man, who sustained so much ill-will on account of discipline, may be heard with patience on this subject.—Yet he was far from supposing that fallible mortals should be able, in all cases, to decide positively who were true Christians and who not, and to rectify all abuses, and to cleanse the Church of all its tares. The middle state between impracticable efforts of severity and licentious neglect was Cyprian's judgment: He thought it necessary that the lapsed should show good marks of penitence; and he held it highly culpable to separate from the visible Church, for the want of that exact purity in the members which the present state of things does not admit. But let us hear the bishop himself: The subject is not, indeed,

Epist. 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

of the first importance, but it deserves, on account of its practical influence, to be deeply considered by all friends of vital godliness.

“ Though there appear to be tares in the Church, our faith and love ought not to be impeded by seeing them, so that we should desert our post.—Our business is to labour, that we ourselves may stand a scrutiny, that when the wheat shall be gathered into the harvest, we may receive reward according to our labour. The Apostle speaks of vessels not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour.

“ Be it our care that we be found vessels of gold or silver: but we are not to break in pieces the vessels of earth: this belongs to the Lord alone, who has a rod of iron.—The servant cannot be greater than his master: nor must any man claim to himself what the Father attributes to the Son alone:—No man should think himself capable of thoroughly purging the floor, or of separating all the wheat from the tares by human judgment. To think so is proud obstinacy and sacrilegious presumption, which a depraved madness assumes to itself; and while some lay claim to a dominion of this kind beyond the limits of justice and equity, they are lost to the Church; and, while they insolently extol themselves, they become blinded by their passions, so as to lose the light of truth. With these views, we have aimed at a proper medium; we have contemplated the balance of the Lord; we have thirsted exceedingly that we might be directed both by the holiness and the mercy of God the Father; and, after a long and careful deliberation, we have settled a just mediocrity.—I refer you to my own books on the subject, which I lately read here; and which, from motives of brotherly love, I have sent over to you, to read. In them there is wanting neither a due censure of the lapsed, nor medicine to heal the penitent.—I have expressed also my

thoughts on the unity of the Church to the best of my feeble judgment *.”

There was a bishop of some note, named Antonius, who seemed disposed to embrace the Novatian schism. To him Cyprian in a long letter explains with much force and clearness the whole of his ideas on the subject. A short abridgment of it may merit perusal, because of the charity and good sense which run through it †.

† He clears himself from the charge of inconsistency, by showing, in both cases, the views on which he acted under very different circumstances, formerly with strictness, now with lenity;—he informs him what had been determined both at Rome and Carthage concerning the lapsed;—he enlarges on the virtues of Cornelius, who had ventured his life in a time of severe trial under Decius;—he defends him against the unjust aspersions of the Novatians, and demonstrates, that very different rules and methods should be used, according to the circumstances of offenders; and that Novatian's stoicism, by which all sins are equal, was absolutely repugnant to the genius of Christianity. He supports his ideas of mercy by striking and apposite passages of Scripture. For instance; “The whole need not a physician, but the sick.” What sort of a physician is he, who says, “I cure only the sound?”—“Nor ought we to think all those whom we see wounded by a degree of apostasy, during the deadly persecution, to be absolutely dead; but rather to lie half dead only, and to be capable of being recovered by sound faith and penitence, so as yet to display in future the true characters of confessors and martyrs.”

.. He shows that the censures of the Church ought not to anticipate the judgment of the Lord. His quotations of Scripture, in behalf of receiving

* He means his Treatises on the Lapsed, and on the Unity of the Church.

† Epis. 52.

penitents again into the Church may well be spared:—The Novatian uncharitableness will, in our days, scarcely find a defender.

He beautifully insists on the propriety and wholesomeness of mercy, gentleness, and charity, and exposes the unreasonableness of the present dissent from this circumstance,—that formerly, in Africa, some bishops excluded adulterers from a return into the Church,—but they did not form a schism on that account. And yet an adulterer appears to him to deserve a greater degree of severity than a man who lapses through fear of torment.—He exposes the absurdity of the Novatians in exhorting men to repent, while they rob them of all those comforts and hopes which should encourage repentance. It is observable, that he alleges nothing particular against the personal character of Novatian:—but he blames Schism with an excess of severity not to be defended.

From another circumstance we are led to remark the strictness of discipline which then prevailed in the purest Churches.—Several persons, who stood firm for a time in persecution and afterwards fell through extremity of torment, were kept three years in a state of exclusion from the Church; and yet they lived all that time with every mark of true repentance.—Cyprian being consulted *, decided that they ought to be re-admitted to communion.

The appearance of a new persecution from Gallus now threatening the Church, Cyprian, with the African synod, wrote to Cornelius on the subject of hastening the reception of penitents, that they might be armed for the approaching storm †.

In the mean time Felicissimus finding, after his condemnation, no security to his reputation in Africa, crossed the sea to Rome, raised a party against Cornelius, and by menaces, threw him into great fear. Cyprian's spirit seems more disturbed on this

* Epis. 53.

† Epis. 54.

occasion than I have seen reason to observe in any of his epistles. He supports the dignity of the episcopal character in a style of great magnificence; but it is evident, that continual ill treatment from seditious characters had led him into some degree of impatience: The language he uses concerning the authority of bishops, would sound strange to our ears, though it by no means contains any definite ideas contrary to the Scriptures. The whole epistle is calculated to rouse the dejected spirit of Cornelius; and shows much of the hero—less of the Christian. He confesses—that he speaks grieved and irritated, by a series of unmerited ill usage. He takes notice that at the very time of writing this, he was again demanded by the people to be exposed to the lions. He speaks of the ordination of Fortunatus and also of Maximus, by the schismatics, in a contemptuous manner.—It is very evident, that, on the whole, he triumphed in Carthage among his own people. His great virtues and unquestionable sincerity secured him their affections; but they seem not to have been sufficiently patient and discreet in the re-admission of offenders: He complains that, in some cases, they were violent and resentful;—and in others, precipitately easy and favourable. The eloquence, and even the genuine charity of this great man, appears throughout this fifty-fifth epistle;—but it is deficient in the meekness and the moderation, which shine in his other performances.

CHAP. XI.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PERSECUTION OF DECIUS
IN THE EASTERN CHURCH.CHAP.
XI.

THE Eastern and Western Churches were, in those times, divided from each other by the Greek and Roman language, though cemented by the common bond—of the Roman government, and much more—of the common Salvation. It will often be found convenient to consider their history distinctly. The gentile Church of Jerusalem still maintained its respectability under Alexander its bishop, who has been mentioned above. He was again called on to confess Christ before the tribunal of the president at Cæsarea ; and, in this second trial of his faith, having acquitted himself with his usual fidelity, he was cast into prison : His venerable locks procured him neither pity nor respect ; and he finally breathed out his soul under confinement*.

At Antioch, Babylas after his confession dying in bonds, Fabius was chosen his successor. In this persecution the renowned Origen was called to suffer extremely. Bonds, torments, a dungeon, the pressure of an iron chair, the distension of his feet for many days, the threats of burning, and other evils were inflicted by his enemies, all which he manfully endured : and his life was still preserved ; for the judge was solicitously careful that his tortures should not kill him. “ What words he uttered on these occasions, and how useful to those who need consolation, many of his epistles,” says Eusebius, “ declare with no less truth than accuracy !”—If the words here alluded to were now extant, more light, I apprehend, might be thrown on the internal character of Origen, in respect to experimental godliness, than by all his works which remain. These

* Euseb. B. 6. from C. 39 to the end.

show the scholar, the philosopher, and the critic :— Those would have displayed the Christian. This great man died in his seventieth year, about the same time as the emperor Decius.

Origen dies
aged 70.

By and by I shall find occasion to insert an estimate of his character.

Dionysius was at this time bishop of Alexandria, —a person of great and deserved renown in the Church. We are obliged to Eusebius for a few fragments of his writings, some of which being historical, must be here inserted. In an epistle to Germanus he writes thus :—“ Sabinus, the Roman governor, sent an officer to seek me, during the persecution of Decius, and I remained four days at home, expecting his coming: he made the most accurate search in the roads, the rivers, and the fields where he suspected I might be hid. A confusion seems to have seized him, that he could not find my house; for he had no idea that a man, in my circumstances, should stay at home. At length, after four days, God ordered me to remove *; and, having opened me a way contrary to all expectation, I and my servants and many of the brethren went together. The event showed that the whole was the work of Divine Providence.—About sun-set, I was seized, together with my whole company, by the soldiers, and was led to Taposiris. But my friend Timotheus, by the providence of God, was not present, nor was he seized. He came afterwards to my house, and found it forsaken and guarded; and he then learned that we were taken captive. How wonderful was the dispensation! but it shall be related precisely as it happened.—A countryman met Timotheus as he was flying in confusion, and asked the cause of his hurry: he told him the truth: the peasant heard the story and went away to a nuptial feast, at which it was the custom to watch all night. He informed the guests of what he had heard. At once, they

Account of
Dionysius,
bishop of
Alexandria.

*.By a vision or some other Divine manifestation, I suppose.

all rose up, as by a signal, and ran quickly to us, and shouted : our soldiers, struck with a panic, fled ; and the invaders found us laid down on unfurnished beds. I first thought they must have been a company of robbers. They ordered me to rise and go out quickly ; at length, I understood their real designs ; and I cried out, and entreated them earnestly to depart, and to let us alone. But, if they really meant any kindness to us, I requested them to strike off my head, and so to deliver me from my persecutors. They compelled me to rise by downright violence : and then I threw myself on the ground. They seized my hands and feet, pulled me out by force ; and placed me on an ass, and conducted me from the place."

In so remarkable a manner was this useful life preserved to the Church. We shall see it was not in vain.

In an epistle to Fabius bishop of Antioch, he gives the following account of the persecution at Alexandria, which had preceded the Decian persecution by a whole year, and which must have happened therefore under Philip, the most open friend of Christians. " A certain augur and poet took pains to stir up the malice of the gentiles against us, and to inflame them with zeal for the support of their own superstitions. Stimulated by him, they gave free course to their licentiousness, and deemed the murder of Christians to be the most perfect piety and the purest worship of demons. They first seized an old man, named Metras, and ordered him to blaspheme : he refused ; and they beat him with clubs, and pricked his face and eyes with sharp reeds : they dragged him to the suburbs, and they there stoned him. Then they hurried one Quinta, a faithful woman, to the idol-temple, and insisted on her worshipping of the gods.—Quinta showed the strongest marks of abominating that practice. They then tied her by the feet ; dragged her over the rough pavement through all the city ; dashed her against mill-stones, and whipped her ; and lastly

they led her back to the place where they had first seized her ; and there they dispatched her. —After this, with one accord, they all rushed on the houses of the godly : every one ran to the house of his neighbour, spoiled and plundered it ; and purloined the most valuable goods, and threw away those things which were vile and refuse, and burnt them in the roads ; and thus was exhibited the appearance of a captive and spoiled city. The brethren fled and withdrew themselves, and received with joy the spoiling of their goods, as those did to whom Paul beareth witness ; and I do not know, that any person, who fell into their hands,—except one,—denied the Lord. Among others, they seized an aged virgin, called Apollonia, and dashed out all her teeth ; and having kindled a fire before the city, they threatened to burn her alive, unless she would consent to blaspheme. This admirable woman begged for a little intermission ; and she then quickly leaped into the fire, and was consumed. They laid violent hands on Serapion in his own house : they tortured him and broke all his limbs ; and, lastly, threw him head-long from an upper room. No road, public or private, was passable to us, by night or by day : the people crying out always and every where, that unless we would speak blasphemy, we should be thrown into the flames ; —and these evils continued a long time. A sedition then succeeded, and a civil war, which averted their fury from us, and turned it against one another ; and again we breathed a little during the mitigation of their rage. Immediately the change of government was announced : The persecuting Decius succeeded Philip our protector, and we were threatened with destruction : The edict, which our Lord foretold would be so dreadful as to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect *, appeared against us.—All were


* It is evident that this application of our Lord's words is a mistake.

astonished ; many Christians of quality discovered themselves immediately through fear ; others, who held public offices, were constrained by their office to appear ; and others were brought forward and betrayed by their gentile relations. Each person was cited by name. They then approached the unholy altars ; some pale and trembling, not as if they were going to sacrifice, but to be themselves the victims ; so that they were derided by the multitude who stood around ; and it was visible to all that they were very much frightened both at the prospect of death and at the crime of sacrificing : but some ran more readily to the altar, and affirmed boldly, that they never had been Christians. Of such our Lord affirmed most truly, that they should be saved with great difficulty *. Of the rest, some followed the various examples above mentioned ; and others fled :—Some persisted in the faith ; and suffered bonds and imprisonment for many days ; but, at last, before they were led to the tribunal, they abjured their religion ;—others held out longer, and endured torments.—But the firm and stable pillars of the Lord, being strengthened by him, and having received vigour and courage proportionate and correspondent to the lively faith which was in them, became admirable martyrs of his kingdom.—The first of these was Julian, a gouty person who could neither stand nor walk ; he was brought forth with two others who carried him ; one of whom immediately denied Christ. The other, called Cronion the Benevolent, and old Julian himself, having confessed the Lord, were led through the whole city,—very large as ye know it is,—sitting on camels : they were then scourged, and were at last burnt in a very hot fire in the view of surrounding multitudes. A soldier, named Besas, stood by them and defended them from insults ; which so incensed the mob, that the man lost his head for having thus behaved boldly in the service of his God.

* I suppose he means because they were rich.

—An African by birth, called Mecar*, and truly meriting the appellation, having resisted much importunity, was burnt alive. After these, Epimachus and Alexander, who had long sustained imprisonment and undergone a thousand tortures, were burnt to death; and along with these four women. Ammonarion, a holy virgin, was grievously tormented by the judge for having declared beforehand that she would not repeat the blasphemy which he ordered: she continued faithful, and was led away to execution. The venerable ancient Mercuria—and Dionysia, a mother, indeed, of many children, but a mother who did not love her children more than the Lord—and another Ammonarion,—these, together with many others, were slain by the sword without being first exposed to torments:—for the president was ashamed of torturing them to no purpose, and of being baffled by women;—which had been remarkably the case in his attempt to overcome the former Ammonarion, who had undergone what might have been esteemed sufficient torture for them all.—Heron, Ater, and Isidore, Egyptians, and with them a boy of fifteen, called Dioscorus, were brought before the tribunal: the boy resisted both the blandishments and the tortures which were applied to him: the rest, after cruel torments, were burnt. The boy having answered in the wisest manner to all questions, and excited the admiration of the judge, was dismissed by him from motives of compassion, with an intimation of hope that he might afterwards repent.—And now the excellent Dioscorus is with us, reserved to a greater and longer conflict. Nemesian was first accused as a partner of robbers; but he cleared himself of this charge before the Centurion:—An information—that he was a Christian was then brought against him, and he came bound before the president, who most unjustly scourged him with twice the severity used in the case of malefactors;

* Happy or blessed.



HISTORY OF THE CHURCH :

and the man acknowledged by Christ as a faithful servant on account of many good works." Thus far Dionysius.

I remark here, 1st, That the connexion, between the sacrament and the grace conveyed by it, being usually thus expressed as if it were necessary and indissoluble, both in baptism and the Lord's Supper, gave occasion to the increase of much superstition in the Church. I am disposed to believe, and certainly to hope, that both Dionysius and Serapion knew that the sign was nothing without the inward grace. Yet perhaps they are not to be acquitted of superstition on account of the inordinate stress which they laid on external things.—The reader must observe that this evil continues to grow during the third century.

2d,—That, along with this superstition, the power of the leaders of the Church would naturally increase beyond the due bounds. That it did so afterwards surprisingly is well known;—but I judge the evil to have begun already both in the East and in the West.

3d,—That there was at that time, among persons of real piety, a general propensity to extend discipline too far. Serapion ought, doubtless, to have been sooner received into the Church. The Lord seems to have favoured him with a token of his loving kindness, by fulfilling his desires of being re-admitted into the Church before he left the world.—But how much more decent and proper would it have been for him to have been received while in health? Satan always pushes men to extremes. Church-discipline was held then too high; with us it is reduced to the lowest state. Without communion with a visible Church establishment in form, however impracticable it might be, it was scarcely thought possible for a man to be saved: Many persons, at that time, would have had no hope of Serapion's salvation, if the power of his disease had prevented the reception of the Eucharist. The clouds of miserable superstition

increased, till by the light of the Reformation they were dispelled. On the contrary, in our age, the Lord's Supper itself is treated with levity by thousands who call themselves Christians; and communion with a settled ministry and Church is esteemed as a thing of trifling consequence by numbers who profess the doctrines of vital godliness.

Dionysius wrote several other tracts, which are mentioned by Eusebius:—Among the rest he wrote to Cornelius, bishop of Rome, in answer to his letter against Novatian*; and informed him—that he had been invited by Helenus of Tarsus in Cilicia, and by the rest of the bishops of his neighbourhood, by Firmilian of Cappadocia and Theoctistes of Palestine, to meet them in a synod at Antioch, where some attempts were made to strengthen the Novatian party.—But all these Churches united to condemn the schism: and, with this view, Dionysius wrote to the Roman confessors both before and after they had returned to the Church. On the whole, the East and West united in condemning the new dissenters; whose HEAD having professed that some brethren had compelled him to the separation, Dionysius wrote to Novatian himself to this effect: “If you were led unwillingly, as you say, you will prove it by returning willingly; for a man ought to suffer any thing rather than to rend the Church of God. Even martyrdom on this account would be no less glorious than on any other;—even more so.—For in common martyrdom a man is a witness for one soul:—here for the whole Church. And now, if you would compel or persuade the brethren to unanimity, your good conduct would be more laudable than your defection was culpable. The latter will be forgotten, the former will be celebrated through the Christian world. But if you find it impracticable to draw over others, save your own soul

* Eusebius certainly calls him Novatus by mistake.

at least; I wish you to be strong in the Lord, and studious of peace.”—Such was the zeal of the Christian leaders at that time for the preservation of **UNITY**. If there had been a defection from Christian purity of doctrine in the general Church, or if the Heads of it, for the most part, had been vicious men in principle or practice, one might have suspected that the Lord had forsaken these, and that his Spirit had rested chiefly with the new separatists. But that godliness in a considerable degree prevailed still in the Church at large is very evident. Cyprian, Dionysius, Cornelius, Firmilian, were holy men: Martyrs, in abundance from their flocks, suffered for Christ’s sake: A number of Church-officers suffered in a very edifying manner:—The lapsed were restored among them by the most Christian methods of mildness and just discipline;—and this with success in a variety of cases.—Dionysius concurred with Cyprian in his views on the subject; and, though the flame of Christian piety was considerably lowered since the days of Ignatius, I see not a shadow of proof that there was any just reason for dissent or any superior degree of spirituality with the Novatians.—If, for example, there had been many persons among them of half the piety of Cyprian, I think it probable that history would not have been silent respecting them.

It is my duty to trace the work of the Divine Spirit wherever I can find it. Traces of this Spirit, with the Novatians in general, in these times, I cannot discern: and yet, it is improbable, that they should have been a people altogether forsaken of God. Wherever the real truth, as it is in Jesus, is professed, there some measure of his Spirit most probably exists. Novatian himself is constantly reprehended both by Cyprian and by Dionysius: Yet, I observe, they cast no imputations on his moral character: His schism alone is the object of their reprehension: Cornelius, indeed, carries the matter still

farther, as we have seen ; but I am not disposed to credit all he says : His temper was heated by personal competition.

Before we proceed to other instances of the Decian persecution, it may be proper to conclude the affair of Novatian : Let us collect what evidence we can ; and endeavour to form a just estimate of his character :—If our observations appear unsatisfactory ;—let it be imputed to the scantiness of the materials.

Novatian was originally a Stoic ; and seems to have contracted all the severity which marked that sect of philosophers. He was born a Phrygian, and came to Rome, where he embraced Christianity. He applied for the office of presbyter ; but, as he had neglected certain ecclesiastical forms after recovery from a sickness, he was objected to by the clergy and the people. The bishop,—probably, Fabian the predecessor of Cornelius,—desired that the rules might be dispensed with in his case. This was granted ; and it is a testimony, surely, rather in favour of his abilities and conduct than otherwise, particularly, as the circumstance stands recorded by the pen of his rival Cornelius *. That he excelled in genius, learning and eloquence, is certain : and hence, it is not probable, that he was a man of debauched or of loose morals. The evils of his schism were unquestionably great ; but no vice seems affixed to his character ; nor does any just suspicion lie against the purity of his intentions. One † of the letters of the Roman clergy to Cyprian, written by Novatian himself, is still extant : It is worthy of a Roman presbyter and of a zealous Christian ;—and, at that time, the writer coincided in opinion with the African prelate. Eusebius, in his Chronicon, ranks him among the confessors : and it is certain, that while he con-

Character
of Nova-
tian.

* See his letter in Eusebius.

† Pam. 31.

tinued presbyter his fame was not only without a blot, but very fair in the Church.

Perhaps it had been happy for him if he had never consented to become a bishop. The preference given to Cornelius in the election of a bishop, was, probably enough, the grand cause of the schism. From being actuated by a temperate degree of severity, he became intolerably inexorable in his ideas of discipline : It is not for man to say how far temper, stoicism, prejudice, and principle might all unite in this business :—We must now behold him bishop of the Novatians, and industriously spreading the schism through the Christian world. The repeated condemnation of it in synods hindered not its growth, and as purity of principle and inflexible severity of discipline, were their favourite objects, it is not to be apprehended that Novatian could have supported himself in the opinion of his followers without some degree of exemplary conduct. He is allowed to have preserved in soundness the Christian FAITH : There is actually extant a treatise by him on the Trinity;—and that, one of the most regular and most accurate which is to be found among the ancients. It is astonishing that any man should ascribe the ideas of the Trinitarians mainly to the Nicene Fathers. We have repeatedly seen proofs of the doctrine being held distinctly in all its parts from the Apostles days. This treatise by Novatian may be added to the list.—I know not how to abridge it better than by referring the reader to the Athanasian creed. The Trinity in Unity, and the Godhead and Manhood of Christ in one person, are not more plainly to be found in that creed, than in the composition of this contemporary of Cyprian.

I wish that a more experimental view,—a more practical use—of Christian doctrines, were to be seen in it. But all professors of Christianity,—Churchmen or dissenters—seem, at that time, to

have much relaxed in this respect. The favour and simplicity of the life of faith in Jesus was not so well known: yet,—particularly under the article of the Holy Ghost,—he speaks very distinctly of “HIM as the author of regeneration, the pledge of the promised inheritance, and, as it were, the hand-writing of eternal salvation,—who makes us the temple of God and his house,—who intercedes for us with ‘groanings which cannot be uttered,’—who acts as our advocate and defender,—who dwells in our bodies, and sanctifies them for immortality. He it is, who fights against the flesh,—hence the flesh fights against the Spirit:”—and he proceeds to speak in the best manner of his holy and blessed operations in the minds of the faithful*.

He wrote also a sensible little tract against the bondage of Jewish meats; in which he explains the nature of Christian liberty, according to the views of St. Paul, with just directions for the maintenance of temperance and decorum.

The letter to Cyprian before mentioned closes his works. He lived to the time of Valerian, under whom Cyprian suffered. In that persecution also fell Novatian by martyrdom, as appears from the authentic testimony of Socrates†. His rival Cornelius died a little time before them, in exile for the faith.—It will be a grateful refreshment to the reader to pause for a moment; and to contemplate these three men meeting in a better world, clothed with the garments of Jesus, and in him knowing their mutual relation, which prejudice hindered in this mortal scene of strife, infirmity, and imperfection. Neither the separation of Novatian, nor the severity with which the two regular bishops condemned him, can be justified.—There seems, however, sufficient evidence of the Christian character of the separatist;

* Nov. Trin. p. 114.

† L. IV. C. 28.



—The general tenor of his life;—and above all, his death, show to whom he belonged*.

The reader will pardon this digression;—if that be indeed a digression,—which shows that the Spirit of God was not limited to one denomination of Christians; and which paves the way for a liberal and candid construction of characters. In the future scenes of this history, while we trace the kingdom of God through a multiplicity of names and divisions of men, it will highly behove us to cultivate an unprejudiced temper.

To proceed with the Decian persecution.—The management of this seems to have been the whole employment of the magistrates. Swords, wild beasts, pits, red-hot chairs, wheels for stretching human bodies, and talons of iron to tear them;—these were at this time the instruments of Pagan vengeance. Malice and covetousness in informing against Christians were eagerly and powerfully set on work during this whole short, but horrible reign: And the genius of men was never known to have had more of employment in aiding the savageness of the heart. Life was prolonged in torture, in order that impatience in suffering might effect at length, what surprise and terror could not.

Mark two examples of Satanic artifice. A martyr having endured the rack and burning plates, the judge ordered him to be rubbed all over with honey, and then to be exposed in the sun, which was very hot, lying on his back with his hands tied behind him, that he might be stung by insects.—Another person, young and in the flower of his age, was, by the order of the same judge, carried into a pleasant garden among flowers, near a pleasing rivulet surrounded with trees: here they laid him on a feather bed, bound him with silken cords, and left him alone. Afterward, a very handsome lewd woman

* Greg. Nyss. vita Thaum. p. 1000.—See Fleury, B. 6.—25.

was introduced to him; who began to embrace him and to court him with all imaginable impudence. The martyr spit in her face; and at length bit off his own tongue; as the most effectual method in his power of resisting the assaults of sensuality. In the most shocking and disgusting trials, Christianity, however, appeared what it is,—true holiness; while its persecutors showed that they were at enmity with every virtuous principle of internal benevolence, and of external decorum*.

Alexander, bishop of Comana, suffered martyrdom by fire. At Smyrna, Eudemon the bishop apostatized, and several unhappily followed his example. But the glory of this Church, once so celebrated by the voice of infallibility†, was not totally lost. The example of Pionius, one of the presbyters, was salutary to all the Churches.—The account of his martyrdom is, in substance, confirmed by Eusebius:—Nor, in general, is there any thing in it improbable, or unworthy of the Christian Spirit‡.—In expectation of being seized, he put a chain about his own neck, and caused Sabina and Asclepiades to do the same,—to show their readiness to suffer. Polemon, keeper of the idol-temple, came to them with the magistrates: “Don’t you know,” says he, “that the emperor has ordered you to sacrifice?” “We are not ignorant of the commandments,” says Pionius, “but they are those commandments which direct us to worship God.” “Come to the market-place,” says Polemon, “and see the truth of what I have said.” “We obey the true God,” said Sabina and Asclepiades.

Martyrdom
of Alexan-
der, bishop
of Comana.

When the martyrs were in the midst of the multitude in the market-place, “It would be wiser in you,” says Polemon, “to submit and avoid the torture.” Pionius began to speak; “Citizens of Smyrna, who please yourselves with the beauty of your walls

* Jerom vita Paul.

† Rev. ii. 8, 9;

‡ Euseb. B. 4. C. 15. Fleury, B. 6—30.

and city; and value yourselves on account of your Poet Homer; and ye Jews, if there be any among you, hear me speak a few words: We find that Smyrna has been esteemed the finest city in the world, and was reckoned the chief of those which contended for the honour of Homer's birth. I am informed that you deride those who come of their own accord to sacrifice, or who do not refuse when urged to it. But surely your admired Homer should teach you never to rejoice at the death of any man. * And ye Jews ought to obey Moses, who tells you, † That shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again †. And Solomon says, 'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth.' ‡ From my part I would rather die, or undergo any sufferings than contradict my conscience in religious concerns. Whence then proceed those bursts of laughter and cruel scoffs of the Jews, pointed not only against those who have sacrificed, but against us? They insult us with a malicious pleasure to see our long peace interrupted.—Though we were their enemies; still we are men.—But what harm have we done them? What have we made them to suffer? Whom have we spoken against? Whom have we persecuted with unjust and unrelenting hatred? Whom have we compelled to worship idols? Have they no compassion for the unfortunate? Are they themselves less culpable than the poor wretches, who, through the fear of men or of tortures, have been induced to renounce their religion?" He then addressed the Jews on the grounds of their own Scriptures, and solemnly placed before the Pagans the day of judgment.

The sermon bore some resemblance to Stephen's.

* Odyss. xxii. v. 412.

† Deut. xxii. 4.

‡ Pionius adapts himself to his audience, and convicts them of guilt even by their own principles, a thing not hard to be done in all cases,—except in those of true Christians, who never fail to show their faith by their works.

§ Acts of the Apostles, Chap. vii.

PERSECUTION OF DECIUS.

in like circumstances: It tended to beget conviction of sins and to lead men to feel their need of the Divine Saviour, according to the justest views and in the soundest taste of the Gospel. He spake long, and was very attentively heard; and there is reason to hope that his exertions were not in vain. The people who surrounded him said with Polemon, "Believe us, Pionius, your probity and wisdom make us deem you worthy to live;—and life is pleasant."—Thus powerfully did conscience and humanity operate in their hearts. "I own," says the martyr, "life is pleasant, but I mean that eternal life which I aspire after: I do not with a contemptuous spirit reject the good things of this life; but I prefer something which is infinitely better:—I thank you for your expressions of kindness: I cannot, however, but suspect some stratagem in it."

The people continued intreating him: and he still discoursed to them of a future state.—The well-known sincerity and unquestionable virtues of the man seem to have filled the Smyrneans with veneration, and his enemies began to fear an uproar in his favour. "It is impossible to persuade you then," said Polemon. "I would to God I could," says Pionius, "persuade you to be a Christian!"

Sabina, by the advice of Pionius, who was her brother, had changed her name, for fear of falling into the hands of her pagan mistress, who, in order to compel her to renounce Christianity, had formerly put her in irons, and banished her to the mountains, where the brethren secretly supported her with nourishment. She now called herself Theodota. "What God dost thou adore?" says Polemon. "God Almighty," she answered, "who made all things;—of which we are assured by his Word Jesus Christ." "And what dost THOU adore?" speaking to Asclepiades. "Jesus Christ," says he. "What, is there another God?" says Polemon. "No," says he, "this is the same whom we come here to confess."—He,

who worships the Trinity in Unity, will find no difficulty in reconciling these two confessions. Let him, who does not so worship, attempt it. One person pitying Pionius, said, "Why do you that are so learned seek death in this resolute manner?"

When carried to prison, they found there a presbyter named Lemnus,—a woman named Macedonia,—and another called Eutychiana, a Montanist.

These all employed themselves in praising God, and showed every mark of patience and cheerfulness. Many Pagans visited Pionius, and attempted to persuade him to renounce his religion:—His answers struck them with admiration. Some persons, who, by compulsion, had sacrificed, visited them and shed many tears. "I now suffer afresh," says Pionius; "and methinks I am torn in pieces when I see the pearls of the Church trod under foot by swine, and the stars of heaven cast to the earth by the tail of the dragon*.—But our sins have been the cause."

The Jews, whose character of bigotry had not been lessened by all their miseries, and whose hatred to Christ continued from age to age with astonishing uniformity, invited some of the lapsed Christians to their synagogue. The generous spirit of Pionius was moved to express itself vehemently against the Jews. Among other things he said, "They pretend that Jesus Christ died like other men by constraint. Was that Man a common felon, whose disciples have cast out devils for so many years? Could that man be forced to die, for whose sake his disciples, and so many others, have voluntarily suffered the severest punishment?"—Having spoken a long time to them, he requested them to depart out of the prison.

Though the miraculous dispensations attendant on Christianity form no part of the plan of this History, I cannot but observe on this occasion, how strongly their continuance in the third century is here attested.

* Rev. xii. 4.

Pionius affirms, that devils were ejected by Christians in the name of Christ; and he does this in the face of enemies, who would have been glad of the shadow of an argument to justify their bitterness, resentment, and perfidy.

The captain of the horse came to the prison, and ordered Pionius to go to the idol-temple. "Your bishop Eudemon hath already sacrificed," said he. The martyr, knowing that nothing of this sort could be done legally till the arrival of the proconsul, refused. The captain put a cord about his neck, and dragged him along with Sabina and others. 'They cried, "We are Christians," and fell to the ground, that they might not enter the idol-temple. Pionius, after much resistance, was forced into it and placed on the ground before the altar; and there stood the unhappy Eudemon, after having sacrificed.

Lepidus, a judge, asked; "What God do you adore?" "Him," says Pionius, "that made heaven and earth." "You mean him that was crucified?" "I mean him whom God the Father sent for the salvation of men." The judges then whispered to one another, and said,—“We must compel them to say what we wish.”—Pionius heard them, and cried, “Blush, ye adorers of false gods: have some respect to justice, and obey your own laws: they enjoin you not to do violence to us; but merely to put us to death.”

Then Ruffinus said, "Forbear, Pionius, this thirst after vain-glory." "Is this your eloquence?" answered the martyr: "Is this what you have read in your books? Was not Socrates thus treated by the Athenians? According to your judgment and advice HE sought after vain-glory, because he applied himself to wisdom and virtue."—Ruffinus was struck dumb.—The case was apposite in a degree: Socrates, undoubtedly, suffered persecution on account of his zeal for moral virtue.

A certain person placed a crown on Pionius.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH:

head, which he tore in pieces before the altar. The
 Pagans finding their persuasions ineffectual, re-
 minded them to prison. A few days after this, the proconsul Quirtilian
 returned to Smyrna, and examined Pionius. They
 then tried both tortures and persuasions in vain;
 and at length, enraged at his obstinacy, he sentenced
 him to be burnt alive. The martyr went cheerfully
 to the place of execution, and thanked God, who had
 preserved his body pure from idolatry. After he
 was stretched and nailed to the wood, the executioner
 said to him, "Change your mind, and the nails shall
 be taken out." "I have felt them," answered Pio-
 nius. He then remained thoughtful for a time;
 afterward he said, "I hasten, O Lord, that I may
 the sooner be a partaker of the resurrection." Metro-
 dorus, a Marcionite, was nailed to a plank of wood
 in a similar manner. They were then both placed
 upright; and a great quantity of fuel was heaped
 around them. — Pionius, with his eyes shut, remained
 motionless, absorbed in prayer while the fire was
 consuming him. At length he opened his eyes, and
 looking cheerfully on the fire, said, "Amen;" his
 last words were, "Lord, receive my soul." Of the
 particular manner in which his companions suffered
 death we have no account. In this narrative we see the spirit of heavenly
 love triumphing over all worldly and selfish con-
 siderations. Does not the zeal of Pionius deserve
 to be commemorated as long as the world endures?
 The man appears to have forgotten his sufferings.
 He is wholly taken up in vindicating the divine truth
 to the last. Who can doubt of his having been a
 faithful preacher of the Gospel? He is intent on the
 blessed work amidst his bitterest pains. Glorious
 exemplification of true religion in its simplicity!!
 If there be any thing particular in the treatment
 he underwent, it consists in the repeated endeavors
 which were made to preserve his life. The mar-

was much respected; though the Christian was abhorred. Integrity and uprightness, when eminent, and supported by wisdom and learning, fail not to overcome the enmity of the human heart against God.

There are many good reasons which may be assigned why sound learning ought to be cultivated by Christians, and especially by all who mean to be pastors of Christ's flock. The case of Pionius clearly intimates this. Knowledge never fails to ensure respect. It does this a thousand times more effectually with mankind than birth or wealth, or rank, or power.

It is evident that Pionius was a man of learning, and that his persecutors esteemed him on that account, and took pains to detach him from Christianity.—We may conceive how useful this accomplishment had been in the course of his ministry.

A Montanist and a Marcionite are the fellow-sufferers of this martyr: The latter is consumed with him in the flames. Doubtless, from all the information of antiquity, both these heresies appear in an odious light. But there might be exceptions, and who so likely to be among those exceptions, as those who suffered? We must not confine the truth of godliness to any particular denomination. Providence, by mixing persons of very opposite parties in the same scene of persecution, demonstrates that the pure faith and love of Jesus may operate in those who cannot own each other as brethren: I know not whether Pionius and Metrodorus did so on earth: I trust they do so in heaven.

In Asia a merchant named Maximus, was brought before Optimus the proconsul, who inquired after his condition? "I was born free," said he, "but I am the servant of Jesus Christ." "Of what profession are you?" "I live by commerce." "Are you a Christian?" "Though a sinner, yet I am a Christian." While the usual process of persuasions and of tortures

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH:

was going forward;—he exclaimed,—“These are not torments which we suffer for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: They are wholesome UNCTIONS.”—Such was the effect of the Holy Ghost shedding the love of God in Christ abroad in the human heart!—He was ordered to be stoned to death*.

All this time the persecution raged in Egypt with unremitting fury. In the lower Thebais there was a young man named Paul, to whom, at fifteen years of age, his parents left a great estate. He was a person of much learning, of a mild temper, and full of the love of God. He had a married sister, with whom he lived. Her husband was base enough to design an information against him, in order to obtain his estate. Paul, having notice of this, retired to the desert mountains, where he waited till the persecution ceased. Habit, at length, made solitude agreeable to him. He found a pleasant retreat, and lived there during fourscore and ten years. At the time of his retirement he was twenty-three, and he died at the age of a hundred and thirteen†. This is the first distinct account of an hermit in the Christian Church.—No doubt ought to be made of the genuine piety of Paul.—Those, who, in our days, condemn ALL Monks with indiscriminating contempt, seem to make no allowance for the prodigious change of times and circumstances. Reflect seriously on the sort of society to which Christians were exposed in the reign of Decius: Was there a day,—an hour, in which they could enjoy its comforts, or secure its benefits? Where could Christian eyes or ears direct their attention,—and not meet with objects exceedingly disgusting? If Paul preferred solitude in such a season, we need not be more surprised than we are at the conduct of Elijah the prophet.—But, why did he not, with the return of peace, return also to the discharge of social duties?—The habit was contracted; and the love of extremes is the infirmity

* Fleury, B. 6—40.

† Ibid. B. 6—48.

of human nature.—Besides, a heart breathing the purest love to God, might naturally enough be led to think the perfection of godliness best attainable in solitude.—The increasing spirit of superstition soon produced a number of imitations of Paul: and the most lamentable effect was, that those, who possessed only external religion, placed their righteousness and their confidence in monastic austerities;—and thus, from the depraved imitations of well-meant beginnings, one of the strongest supports of false religion gradually strengthened itself in the Christian world.

Here we close the account of the Decian persecution. Its author is admired by Pagan writers. What has been said of Trajan and Antoninus is applicable to him. He was a moralist; and he was a cruel persecutor.—It cannot be denied, that for thirty months the Prince of Darkness had full opportunity to gratify his malice and his fury. But the Lord meant to chasten and to purify his Church, —not to destroy it. The whole scene is memorable on several accounts.—It was not a local or intermitting, but a universal and constant persecution: and, therefore, it must have transmitted great numbers to the regions where sin and pain shall be no more.—The peace of thirty years had corrupted the whole Christian atmosphere: The lightning of the Decian rage refined and cleared it. No doubt, the effects were salutary to the Church. External Christianity might indeed have still spread, if no such scourge had been used; but the internal spirit of the Gospel would, probably, have been extinguished. The survivors had an opportunity of learning, in the faithfulness of the martyrs, what that spirit is; and men were again taught, that HE alone, who strengthens Christians in their sufferings, can effectually convert the heart to true Christianity.—The storm, however, proved fatal to many individuals who apostatized; and Christianity was, in that way, cleared of many false friends. We have also not

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two collateral evils,—Both the formation of schisms and of superstitious splitudes had their date from the Decian persecution.

CHAP. XII. — General Church Council at Ariminum, A. D. 253.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH DURING THE REIGN OF GALLUS.

THE successor of Decius allowed the Church of Christ a little tranquillity. During that space the two small treatises of Cyprian concerning the Lapsed and concerning Unity, were, doubtless, of some service in recovering the lapsed to a state of penitence, and in disposing the minds of men to preserve the unity of the Church. In the former of these treatises, indeed, it must be confessed he carries his censure of the Novatians too far. The sin and the danger of rending the body of Christ might have been stated in the strongest terms, without pronouncing the evil to be absolutely damnable. This was carrying the matter beyond all bounds of moderation. But the same candour which should incline one to apprehend that Novatian was influenced by good intentions, in his too rigid scheme, pleads also for the motives of Cyprian's zeal in the maintenance of unity. — He seems to have considered the mischief as most exceedingly destructive; and he can find no terms sufficiently strong to express his detestation of it.

But Gallus soon began to disturb the peace of the Christians, though not with the incessant fury of his predecessor. — A Roman presbyter, named Hippolytus, had been seduced into Novatianism; but his mind had not been perverted from the faith and love of Jesus. He was now called on to suffer martyrdom, which he did with courage and fidelity. Either curiosity or a desire of instructive information in-

Some persons to ask him in the last scene of
things, whether he still persisted in the com-
munion of Novatian? He declared in the most
plain terms, that he now saw the affair in a new
—that he repented of having encouraged the
schism, —and that he died in the communion of the
universal Church.—Such a testimony must have weak-
ened the influence of the schism*.

During this persecution of Gallus it was that Corne-
lius confessed the faith of Christ, and was banished
by the emperor, to Civita Vecchia; which gave oc-
casion to a congratulatory letter from Cyprian. In
the last part of it he reflects on the Novatians with great
vehemence:—The rest breathes a fervent spirit
of piety and charity, and throws a strong light on two
important facts;—namely,—that the persecution of
Christians was severe;—and, that the Roman Chris-
tians bore it with becoming and exemplary fortitude.
We have been made acquainted, dearest brethren,
with the glorious testimonies of your faith and
courage; and we have received the honour of your
confession with such exultation, that, in the praises
of your excellent conduct, we reckon ourselves part-
ners and companions. For, as we have but one
heart, united hearts, and indivisible concord, what
do we rejoice not in the honours of his fellow-pastors
and brethren? Or what brotherhood does not every-
where exult in the joy of brothers? We cannot ex-
press how great was our joy and gladness when we
heard of your prosperous fortitude;—that at Rome
you were the leader of the confession; and, moreover,
that the confession of the leader strengthened, in the
rest, their disposition to confess;—that while
you opened the way to glory, you incited many to be-
lieve in the glory of your glory; so that we are at a loss
what most to celebrate,—your active and steady
courage, or the inseparable love of the brethren. The
conduct of the bishop in leading the way was publicly
acknowledged. P. 7. x.

admired; while the union of the brethren in following him was proved beyond contradiction: There was but one mind and one voice among you all. The Apostle foresaw, in spirit, this faith and firmness of the whole Roman Church, which have shone so illustriously; and, in praising the primitive fathers, he stirs up their future sons to an imitation of their courage and patience. Your unanimity and perseverance are great, and an instructive example to the brethren. Ye have taught largely the important lesson of fearing God, of firmly adhering to Christ, of uniting pastors with the people, brethren with brethren in one common danger: ye have proved,—that a concord thus formed is invincible;—that the God of peace hears and answers the joint prayers of the peace-makers.—With terrible violence the adversary rushed to attack the soldiers of Christ; but was bravely repulsed.

“He had hoped to supplant the servants of God, by finding them, like raw soldiers, unprepared: He had hoped to circumvent a few individuals; but he found them united for resistance: and he learnt,—that the soldiers of Jesus remain on the watch sober and armed for the battle; that they cannot be conquered;—that they may die; but that they are invincible because they fear not death;—that they resist not aggressors, since it is not lawful for them, though innocent, to kill the guilty*: and lastly—that they readily give up their life and shed their blood, in order that they may the more quickly depart from an evil world in which wickedness and cruelty rage with so much fierceness. What a glorious spectacle under the immediate eyes of God! What a joy in the sight of Christ and of his Church, that—not a single soldier, but the whole army together, endured the warfare! Every individual, who heard of

* A plain proof of the passiveness of Christians, still continued from the Apostolic age, under the most unjust treatment.

this proceeding, has joined in it: How many lapsed are restored by this glorious confession! For now they have stood firm; and, by the very grief of their penitence, are made more magnanimous: Their former fall may now be justly considered as the effect of sudden tremor; but they have returned to their true character: they have collected real faith and strength from the fear of God, and have panted for martyrdom.

“As much as possible we earnestly exhort our people not to cease to be prepared for the approaching contest, by watching, fasting, and prayers. These are our celestial arms: these are our fortresses and weapons. Let us remember one another in our supplications: Let us be unanimous and united: and let us relieve our pressures and distresses by mutual charity: And whosoever of us shall first be called hence, let our mutual love in Christ continue; and let us never cease to pray to our merciful Father for all our brethren and our sisters.”

Thus ardent was the spirit of Cyprian in the expectation of martyrdom! And so little account did he make of temporal things! And, in this natural and easy manner, did he esteem the dreadful scenes of persecution as matter of joy.

He himself was preserved, for the use of the Church, beyond the life of Gallus, as well as of Decius.—Cornelius died in exile: His faithfulness in suffering for Christ evinces all along whose servant he was;—otherwise, history affords little evidence respecting his character.—The little specimen which we have of his writings, will induce no one to think highly of his genius or capacity.

It is no wonder that Cyprian, who had seen and known such dreadful devastations under Decius, finding after a very short interval, the persecution renewed by Gallus, should be tempted to imagine the approach of Antichrist,—the end of the world,—and the day of judgment to be at hand. Sagacious

and holy men are never more apt to be deceived than when they attempt to look into futurity. God hath made the present so much the exclusive object of our duty, that he will scarcely suffer even his best and wisest servants to gain reputation for skill and foresight by any conjectures concerning the times and the seasons, which he hath reserved in his own power. The persecution of Gallus proved, however, a light one compared with that of Decius. Under very formidable apprehensions of it, Cyprian wrote an animating letter to the people of Thibarîs*. The mistaken idea I have mentioned, probably, added spirit to the epistle; nevertheless the reasoning is solid; and his arguments, and the Scriptures which he quotes, deserve attention in all ages.—A few extracts may gratify the reader.

“I had intended, most dear brethren, and wished, —if circumstances had permitted, agreeably to the desire you have frequently expressed,—myself to have come among you; and, to the best of my poor endeavours, to have strengthened the brotherhood with exhortations. But urgent affairs detain me at Carthage; I cannot make excursions into a country so distant as yours; nor be long absent from my people. Let these letters then speak for me.

“You ought to be well assured, that the day of affliction is at hand; and, that the end of the world, and the time of Antichrist is near: We should all stand prepared for the battle, and think only of the glory of eternal life and of the crown of Christian confession. Nor ought we to flatter ourselves that the imminent persecution will resemble the last:—a heavier and more ferocious conflict hangs over us, for which the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves with sound faith and vigorous fortitude; and consider that they† daily drink the cup of the blood of Christ, for this reason,—that they them-

* Epis. 56.

† The daily reception of the Lord's Supper appears to have been the practice of the African Church at that time.



may be able to shed their blood for HIM.—
To follow what Christ hath taught and done is to be
willing to be found with Christ. As John the Apostle
says, “He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought
himself also to walk even as he walked.” Thus also
the blessed Apostle Paul exhorts and teaches, say-
ing, “We are the sons of God, and if sons, then
heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we suffer
with him that we may also be glorified together.
Let no man desire any thing now which belongs to
a perishing world; but let him follow Christ, who
lives for ever, and who makes his servants to live,
if indeed they be settled in the faith of his name.
For the time is come, most dear brethren, which our
Lord long ago foretold, saying ‘The hour is coming,
when whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God
service.’” In his usual manner he quotes those
Scriptures which relate to persecution: and, doubt-
less, the force and beauty of them would then be
felt and admired, more than they are by us, who, if
he to be feared, are apt to speculate upon them, at
our ease with too much indifference.

Observe how justly he arms their minds against
the discouragement which the circumstances of ap-
proaching persecution are apt to induce. “Let no
one, when he sees our people scattered through fear
of persecution, be disturbed, because he sees not
the brethren collected, nor the bishops employed
among them. We, whose principles allow us to
suffer death, but not to inflict it, cannot possibly, in
such a season, be all in one place. Wherever, there-
fore, in those days, by the necessity of the time, any
one shall be separated, in body, not in spirit, from
the rest of the flock,—let not such a one be moved
at the horror of the flight, nor be terrified by the
solitude of the desert, while he retreats and lies hid.
No man is alone, who hath Christ for his com-
panion: No man is without God, who, in his own
soul, preserves the temple of God undefiled. The

Christian may indeed be assailed by robbers or by wild beasts among the mountains and deserts; he may be afflicted by famine, by cold, and by thirst; he may lose his life in a tempest at sea,—but the SAVIOUR himself watches his faithful soldier fighting in all these various ways; and is ready to bestow the reward which he has promised to give in the resurrection.”

He then produces precedents of Scripture-saints, who suffered for God in the most ancient times, and adds, “How shameful must it be for a Christian to be unwilling to suffer, when the Master suffered first; to be unwilling to suffer for our own sins, when he, who had no personal sin, suffered for us*. The Son of God suffered, that he might make us the sons of God:—and, shall not the sons of men be willing to suffer that they may continue to be esteemed the children of God?

“Antichrist is come, but Christ is also at hand.—The enemy rages and is fierce, but the Lord is our defender: and he will avenge our sufferings and our wounds.”—He again makes apposite Scripture-quotations.—That from the Apocalypse is remarkable, “If any man worship the beast and his image,” &c. REV. xiv. 9.

“O what a glorious day,” continues Cyprian, “will come, when the Lord shall begin to recount his people, and to adjudge their rewards;—to send the guilty into hell;—to condemn our persecutors to the perpetual fire of penal flame;—and to bestow on us the reward of faith and of devotedness to him. What glory! what joy! to be admitted to see God;—to be honoured; to partake of the joy of eternal light and salvation with Christ the Lord YOUR God; to salute Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the

* I have translated this literally. The difference between suffering for our own sins, and suffering for us, is striking; the first is corrective, the second is by imputation. Cyprian believed the atonement of Christ, and therefore varied his phraseology, to prevent mistakes.

Patriarchs, and Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs ; to joy with the righteous, the friends of God, in the pleasures of immortality !—When that revelation shall come, when the beauty of God shall shine upon us, we shall be as happy as the deserters and rebellious will be miserable in inextinguishable fire.”

Such are the views of the next life which this good bishop sets before Christians. The palm of heavenly-mindedness belonged to these persecuted saints : and I wish, with all our theological improvements, we may attain to a measure of this zeal amidst the various good things of this life, which, as Christians, we at present enjoy.

Lucius was chosen bishop of Rome in the place of Cornelius ; but was immediately driven into exile by the authority of Gallus. Cyprian congratulated him both on his promotion and on his sufferings. His exile must have been of short duration. He was permitted to return to Rome in the year two hundred and fifty-two ; and a second congratulatory letter was written to him by Cyprian *. He suffered death soon after ; and was succeeded by Stephen. —The episcopal seat at Rome was then, it should seem, the next door to martyrdom.

Lucius cho-
sen Bishop
of Rome,
A. D.
252.

It was not owing to any diminution of his usual zeal and activity, that the African prelate was still preserved alive, while three of his contemporaries at Rome, Fabian, Cornelius, and Lucian, died a violent death or in exile. About this time he dared to write an epistle to a noted persecutor of those times, named Demetrianus : and, with great freedom and dignity, he exposed the unreasonableness of the pagans in charging the miseries of the times upon the Christians. There will be no necessity to give any detail of his reasonings on the subject :—Paganism has at this day no defenders.—The latter part of the epistle, which is exhortatory and doctrinal,

* Epis. 58

shall be afterwards considered, when we come to make an estimate of Cyprian's theological works.

Pestilence
in Africa,
A. D.
252.

The short reign of Gallus was distinguished by so large an assemblage of human miseries, as to give a plausible colour to Cyprian's mistake of the near approach of the end of the world. A dreadful pestilence broke out in Africa, which daily carried off numberless persons ; and frequently swept away whole houses. The Pagans were alarmed beyond measure : Through fear, they neglected the burial of the dead, and violated the duties of humanity. The bodies of many lay in the streets of Carthage, and in vain seemed to ask the pity of passengers*. —It was on this occasion,—that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Christians to show the practical superiority of their religion ; and, that Cyprian, in particular, exhibited one of the most brilliant proofs of his real character. He gathered together his people, and expatiated on the subject of mercy. He pointed out to them,—that if they did no more than others,—no more than the heathen and the publican did in showing mercy to their own, there would be nothing so very admirable in their conduct ;—that Christians ought to overcome evil with good, and, like their heavenly Father, to love their enemies, since he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Why does not he, who professes himself a son of God, imitate the example of his Father ? We ought to answer to our birth, and those, who appear to be born again of God, should not degenerate, but should be solicitous to evidence the genuineness of their relation to God by the imitation of his goodness. Much more than this, Pontius tells us, was said by him.—But Pontius is always very scanty in his informations.

The eloquent voice of Cyprian, on this occasion as on others, roused the alacrity of his people. The

* Vit. Pont.

Christians ranked themselves into classes for the purpose of relieving the public distress. The rich contributed largely: The poor gave what they could; namely, their labour with extreme hazard of their lives:—The Pagans saw with astonishment the effects of the love of God in Christ; and had a salutary opportunity of contrasting these effects with their own selfishness and inhumanity.

The dreadful calamity of the Plague gave to Cyprian an opportunity of impressing on the minds of his people, what, in truth, had been the ruling object of his own life since his conversion, namely—a warm and active regard for the blessings of immortality, joined with a holy indifference for things below. He published on this occasion his short treatise on Mortality. He, who wrote it, must have felt what all have need to feel,—how little a thing life is,—how valuable the prospect of heavenly bliss! The whole of this little tract is very precious; but the reader must be content with a few extracts.

“The kingdom of God, my dearest brethren, shows itself to be just at hand. The reward of life; the joy of eternal salvation, perpetual gladness, and paradise lost,—all these things come into our possession now that the world passes away: Heavenly and eternal glories succeed earthly, fading trifles. What room is there for anxiety, solicitude, or sadness, unless faith and hope are wanting? If, indeed, a man be unwilling to go to Christ, or does not BELIEVE that he is going to reign with him, such a one has good reason to fear death: For, ‘the just live by faith.’—Are ye then just; Do ye live by faith; Do ye really believe in the promise of God?—If so,—why do ye not feel secure of the faithfulness of Christ; why do ye not embrace his call, and bless yourselves that ye shall soon be with him, and be no more exposed to Satan?”

He then makes an apposite use of the case of good old Simeon, and adds,

“Our stable peace, our sound tranquillity, c

perpetual security, is in the world to come :—In this world we wage a daily war with our spiritual enemies ; we have no rest : If one sin be subdued, another is up in arms :—We are continually exposed to temptations ; but the divine laws forbid us to yield to them.—Surely, amidst such constant pressures, we ought to be joyful in the prospect of hastening to Christ by a speedy departure. How does our Lord himself instruct us on this very head ? Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice ; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.—Who does not wish to be free from sorrow ? Who would not run to take possession of joy ? Since then to see Christ is joy, and since our joy cannot be full till we do see HIM,—what blindness, what infatuation is it, to love the penal pressures and tears of the world, and not to be desirous of quickly partaking of that joy which shall never pass away !

“ The cause of this, dear brethren, is **UNBELIEF** : We none of us believe really and solidly those things to be true which the God of truth promises,—whose word is eternally firm to those that put their trust in him. If a man of a grave and respectable character promises you any thing, you do not doubt his performance, because you know him to be faithful. Now God himself speaks with you ; and dare you waver in uncertainty ? HE promises you immortality when ye shall depart out of this world ; and will ye still doubt ?—‘ This is not to know God : This is to offend, with the sin of unbelief, Christ the Lord and Master of believers :—‘ To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,’ said the blessed Apostle,—who computed it to be gain indeed,—no longer to be detained in the snares of the world,—no longer to be obnoxious to sin and the flesh,—to be exempt from excruciating pressures,—to be freed from the poisonous jaws of Satan,—and lastly, to go to the joys of eternal salvation upon the call of Christ.”

Some of Cyprian’s people happened to be stag-

gered in their minds, because they found that Christians were liable to be afflicted with the plague as others : Upon which, the bishop explained to them—that IN SPIRIT the children of God are indeed separated from the rest of mankind ; but that, in all other respects, they are obnoxious to the common evils of human life. In his usual manner he supports his precepts by Scripture examples ; and speaks eloquently and solidly of the benefits of afflictions, and of the opportunity of showing what spirit they are of. “ Let that man fear to die,” says he, “ who has the second death to undergo ; who is not born of water and the spirit ; who is not a partaker of the cross and passion of Christ ; and whom eternal flame will torment with perpetual punishment. To such a one life is indeed a desirable object, because it delays his condemnation :—but what have good men to dread from death ?—THEY are called by it to an eternal refreshment.—There is, however, great use in a season of uncommon mortality : It rouses the idle ; compels deserters to return ; and produces faith in the Gentiles : It dismisses and sends to rest many old and faithful servants of God ; and it raises fresh and numerous armies for future battles.

“ We should consider and think again and again, that we have renounced the world and live here as strangers. What stranger loves not to return to his own country ? Let us rejoice in the day which summons us to our home.—There, a great number of dear friends await us : What raptures of mutual joy to see and embrace one another !”

The active as well as the passive graces of Cyprian were kept in perpetual exercise by various calamities, which happened at no great distance of time from each other. The madness of men has ever been generating the horrors and miseries of war, and there have never been wanting poets and historians to celebrate the praises of those who have most exceeded others in shedding human blood.—It belongs to

narrations purely Christian to record, with a modest, yet firm approbation, the actions of holy men, whom the world despises, but whom the grace of God leads to the exercise of real love to God and men.—Mark another instance of Cyprian's truly Christian benevolence. Numidia, the country adjoining to Carthage, had been blessed with the light of the Gospel, and a number of Churches were planted in it. By an irruption of the barbarous nations, who neither owned the Roman sway, nor had the least acquaintance with Christianity, many Numidian converts were carried into captivity. Eight bishops, Januarius, Maximus, Proculus, Victor, Modianus, Nemesian, Nampulus, and Honoratus, wrote the mournful account to the prelate at Carthage. What he felt and did on the occasion his own answer will best explain. The love of Christ and the influence of his Holy Spirit will appear to have been not small in the African Church from this and from the foregoing case; nor will the calamities of the times and the scourge of persecution seem to have been sent to them in vain*.

“ With much heart-felt sorrow and tears we read your letters, dearest brethren, which ye wrote to us in the solicitude of your love concerning the captivity of our brethren and sisters. For who would not grieve in such cases? or who would not reckon the grief of his brother his own? since the Apostle Paul says, ‘ If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member rejoice, all the other members rejoice with it;’ and elsewhere, ‘ Who is weak, and I am not weak?’ Therefore now the captivity of our brethren is to be reckoned **OUR** captivity; and the grief of those who are in danger is to be reckoned as **OUR OWN** grief, since we are all one body:—Not only our affections, but the religion of Jesus itself ought to incite us to redeem the brethren: For, since the Apostle says, in another place, ‘ Know

* Epis. 60. Pam.

ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' It follows, that even if our love did not induce us to help the brethren, yet, in such circumstances, we ought to consider, that they which are taken captive, are the temples of God, and that we ought not, by a long delay and neglect, to suffer the temples of God to remain in captivity, but to labour with all our might, and quickly to show our obsequiousness to Christ our Judge, our LORD, AND OUR GOD. For whereas Paul the Apostle says, 'As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have been baptized into his death;' Christ is to be viewed as existing in our captive brethren; and HE, who dwells and abides in us, must, by a sum of money, be redeemed from captivity, and snatched from the hands of the barbarians;—HE, who by his cross and blood*, redeemed us from death, and snatched us from the jaws of Satan.—In fact, HE suffers these things to happen, in order that our faith may be tried, and that it may be seen whether we be willing to do for another what every one would wish to be done for himself, were he a prisoner among the barbarians. For who, if he be a father, does not now feel as if his sons were in a state of captivity? Who,—if a husband,—is not affected as if his own wife were in that calamitous situation? This must be the case, if we have but the common sympathy of men.—Then how great ought our mutual sorrow and vexation to be on account of the danger of the virgins who are there held in bondage! Not only their slavery, but the loss of their chastity is to be deplored: the BONDS of barbarians are not so much to be dreaded as the lewdness of men, lest the members of Christ dedicated to him, and devoted † for ever to

* Redemption by the blood of Jesus, union and fellowship with him maintained in the soul by faith, and the returns of love answerable to his loving kindness, these are the principles of Christian benevolence.

† Voluntary celibacy, I apprehend, was in growing repute in the Church at that time. St. Paul's advice in 1 Cor. 7. 1. of

the honour of continency, should be defiled and insulted by libidinous savages.

“ Our brethren, ever ready to work the work of God, but now much more quickened by great sorrow and anxiety to forward so salutary a concern, have freely and largely contributed to the relief of the distressed captives. For, whereas the Lord says in the Gospel, ‘ I was sick, and ye visited me ;’ with how much stronger approbation would he say, ‘ I was a captive, and ye redeemed me !’ And when again he says, ‘ I was in prison, and ye came to me ;’ how much more is it in the same spirit to say,—I was in the prison of captivity and lay shut up and bound among barbarians, and ye freed me from the dungeon of slavery : Ye shall receive your reward of the Lord in the day of judgment.

“ Truly we thank you very much that ye wished us to be partakers of your solicitude, and of a work so good and necessary ;—that ye have offered us fertile fields in which we might deposit the seeds of our hope with an expectation of an exuberant harvest. We have sent a hundred thousand sesterces,—the collection of our clergy and laity * of the Church of Carthage, which you will dispense forthwith according to your diligence. Heartily do we wish that no such thing may happen again, and that the Lord may protect our brethren from such calamities. But if, to try our faith and love, such afflictions should again befall you, hesitate not to acquaint us ; and be assured of the hearty concurrence of our Church with you both in prayer and in cheerful contributions.

“ That you may remember in your prayers, our brethren, who have cheerfully contributed,—I have subjoined the names of each ;—I have added also

first Cor. had then many followers, but monastic vows had yet no existence.

* About 781 *l.* 5*s.* sterling.—See Notes to Epis. 62, Oxford Edit.

the names of our colleagues in the ministry, who were present and contributed, in their own names and in that of the people; and, besides my own proper quantity, I have set down and sent their respective sums. We wish you, brethren, always prosperity."

About this time, Cyprian wrote to an African bishop, named Cæcilius, for the purpose of correcting a practice in the administration of the Lord's Supper, which had crept into some Churches,—of using water instead of wine.—With arguments drawn from the Scriptures, he insists on the necessity of wine in the ordinance, as a proper emblem of the blood of Christ.

The appointment of Stephen to the bishopric of Rome was soon followed by the death of Gallus; who was slain, in the year two hundred and fifty-three, after a wretched reign of eighteen months.

Death of
Gallus,
A. D.
253.

CHAP. XIII.

THE PACIFIC PART OF VALERIAN'S REIGN.

UNDER Gallus the peace of the Church of Christ seems to have been very short and precarious. But his successor Valerian, for upwards of three years, proved their friend and protector. His house was full of Christians, and he appears to have had a strong predilection in their favour.

CHAP.
XIII.

The Lord exercises his people in various ways. There are virtues adapted to a state of prosperity as well as of adversity.—The wisdom and love of God, in directing the late terrible persecutions, have been plainly made manifest by the excellent fruits.—Let us now attend to the transactions of Christians during this interval of refreshment.

The affairs of Cyprian detain us long, because his eloquent pen continues to attract us; and because

we would not lose a faithful and an able guide, till we are compelled to leave him.—Probably, there were many before his time, whose Christian actions would have equally deserved to be commemorated : But the materials of information fail us : The fine compositions of this bishop are still, however, a capital source of historical instruction.

During the tranquillity under the emperor Valerian, a council was held in Africa, by sixty-six bishops, with Cyprian at their head. The object of this assembly was, doubtless, the regulation of various matters relating to the Church of Christ.—These bishops had, unquestionably, each of them, a small diocese ; and with the assistance of their clergy, they superintended their respective jurisdictions according to the primitive mode of Church-government. The face of Africa, which is now covered with Mahometan, idolatrous, and piratical wickedness, afforded in those days a very pleasing spectacle ; for we have good reason to believe that a real and salutary regard was paid to the various flocks by their ecclesiastical shepherds. But, we have no particular accounts of the proceedings of this council beyond what is contained in a letter of Cyprian, to which I shall presently advert. He mentions two points, which engaged their attention ;—but, it is very likely, that matters of greater importance than either of those points were then reviewed :—The synod was worthy of the name of Christian : many of the bishops then present had faithfully maintained the cause of Christ during scenes of trial the most severe that can be imagined ; and I know no ground for suspecting the clergy of those times to have been influenced by schemes of political ambition for increasing their wealth or power.

A presbyter, named Victor, had been re-admitted into the Church without having undergone the legitimate time of trial in a state of penance, and also without the concurrence and consent of the people. His bishop, Therapius, had done this arbitrarily and

UNDER VALERIAN.

contrary to the institutes of the former council for settling such matters. Cyprian, in the name of the council, contents himself with reprimanding Therapius ; but yet confirms what he had done, and warns him to take care of offending in future.

This is one of the points. And, we see hence that a strict and godly discipline, on the whole, now prevailed in the Church ; and that the wisest and most successful methods of recovering the lapsed were used. The authority of bishops was firm, but not despotic : and the share of the people, in matters of ecclesiastical correction and regulation, appears worthy of notice.

The other point he thus explains in the same letter addressed to Fidus : “ As to the care of infants, of whom you said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the ancient law of circumcision should be so far adhered to, that they ought not to be baptized till the eighth day ; we were all of a very different opinion. We all judged that the mercy and grace of God should be denied to none. For, if the Lord says in his Gospel, ‘ the Son of man is not to come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them,’ how ought we to do our utmost, as far as in us lies, that no soul be lost ! Spiritual circumcision should not be impeded by carnal circumcision. If, even to the foulest offenders when they afterwards believe, remission of sins is granted, and none is prohibited from baptism and grace ; how much more should an infant be admitted ;—who, just born, hath not sinned in any respect, except, that being carnally produced according to Adam, he hath, in his first birth, contracted the contagion of the ancient deadly nature ;—and who obtains the remission of sins with the less difficulty, because not his own actual guilt, but that of another, is to be remitted ?

“ Our sentence therefore, dearest brother, in the council was, that none, by us, should be prohibited

from baptism and the grace of God, who is merciful and kind to all."

I purpose carefully to avoid disputes on subjects of small moment. Yet to omit a word here on a point, which hath produced volumes of strife, might seem almost a studied affectation: On such occasions I shall briefly and pacifically state my own views, as they appear deducible from evidence.

Defence of
Infant-bap-
tism.

Instead of disputing whether the right of infant-baptism is to be derived from Scripture alone, and whether tradition deserves any attention at all, I would simply observe,—that the Scripture itself seems to speak for an infant baptism* ;—and further, that tradition, in matters of custom and discipline, is of real weight, as appears from the confession of every one; for every one is glad to support his cause by it, if he can:—and, in the present case,—to those who say that the custom of baptizing children was not derived from the apostolical ages, the traditional argument may fairly run in language nearly Scriptural, "if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the Churches of God †:"—and we never had any such custom as that of confining baptism to adults.

Here is an assembly of sixty-six pastors, men of approved fidelity and gravity, who have stood the fiery trial of some of the severest persecutions ever known, and who have testified their love to the Lord Jesus Christ, in a more striking manner than any Antipædo-baptists have had an opportunity of doing in our days; and, if we may judge of their religious views by those of Cyprian,—and they are all in perfect harmony with him,—they are not wanting in any fundamental of godliness. No man in any age more revered the Scriptures, and made more copious use of them on all occasions, than he did; and,—it must be confessed,—in the very best manner. For he uses them continually, for PRACTICE, not for

* 1 Cor. vii. 14.

† 1 Cor. xi. 16.

OSTENTATION; for USE, not for the sake of VICTORY in argument.—Before this holy assembly a question is brought,—not whether infants should be baptized at all,—none contradicted this,—but, whether it is right to baptize them immediately, or on the eighth day? Without a single negative, they all determined to baptize them immediately. This transaction passed in the year two hundred and fifty-three. Let the reader consider: If infant-baptism had been an innovation, it must have been now of a considerable standing: The disputes concerning Easter, and other very uninteresting points, show that such an innovation must have formed a remarkable æra in the Church. The number of heresies and divisions had been very great. Among them all such a deviation from apostolical practice as this, MUST have been remarked. To me it appears impossible to account for this state of things, but on the footing that it had EVER been allowed; and, therefore, that the custom was that of the first Churches. Though, then, I should wave the argument drawn from that sentence of St. Paul, “Else were your children unclean, but now they are holy;”—and yet it is not easy to explain its meaning by any thing else than infant-baptism,—I am under a necessity of concluding, that the antagonists of infant-baptism are mistaken. Yet I see not why they may not serve God in sincerity, as well as those who are differently minded. The greatest evil lies in the want of charity: and in that contentious eagerness, with which singularity, in little things, is apt to be attended. Truly good men have not always been free from this;—perhaps few persons, on the whole, cultivated larger and more generous views than our African prelate;—yet, in one instance, we shall presently see, he was seduced into a bigotry of spirit not unlike to that which I here disapprove, and greatly lament.

I could have wished that Christian people had never been vexed with a controversy so frivolous as

this about baptism : but having, once for all, given my views and the reasons of them, I turn from the subject, and observe further,—that there is, in the extract of the letter before us, a strong and clear testimony of the faith of the ancient Church concerning the doctrine of original sin. One may safely be allowed to reason, on that head, in the same way as in the case just now considered ; but the fulness of Scripture concerning so momentous a point precludes the necessity of traditional arguments. A lover of divine truth will, however, not be displeased to find—that, without contradiction, Christians in the middle of the third century did believe, that men were born in sin and under the wrath of God through Adam's transgression, and, by their connexion with him as a federal head, were involved in all the consequences of his offence. Such were the sentiments of the ancient Christians in general ;—of the very best Christians,—who possessed the Spirit of Christ in the most powerful degree.—The just consequences, which belong to this fact, are seldom attended to by persons who are wise in their own conceit.—“ Let us attend,” say they, “ to right reason,—to modern improvements in the interpretation of Scripture, and let us reject without ceremony the obsolete absurdities of ancient ignorance ;”—The real practical meaning of which is this : We will torture and twist, in every possible direction, the most perspicuous passages of holy writ, rather than we will acknowledge them to contain doctrines which we dislike.—To submit at once to the testimony of the Divine Word is, in itself, the most reasonable thing in the world ; but when men will not abide by that ;—when they will substitute schemes of their own fancy and invention,—in the place of actual revelation,—and still profess themselves to be under the guidance of the Scriptures, it may then be very expedient to oppose and confute their unwarrantable constructions and criticisms by the unanimous judgment of the

primitive Church, who had the best opportunity of knowing the truth.—There is no unprejudiced mind, which will not feel the force of this argument.

The following private case,—which must have happened in time of peace,—and therefore may properly be referred to this period, deserves, on account of the light, which it throws on primitive Christian manners, to be distinctly recorded.

“Cyprian to Eucratius his brother. Health. Your love and esteem have induced you, dearest brother, to consult me as to what I think of the case of a Player among you, who still continues to instruct others in that infamous and miserable art, which he himself hath learnt. You ask, whether he should be allowed the continuance of Christian communion? I think it very inconsistent with the majesty of God, and the rules of his Gospel, that the modesty and honour of the Church should be defiled by so base and infamous a contagion. In the law* men are prohibited to wear female attire, and are pronounced abominable; how much more criminal must it be, not only to put on woman’s garments, but also to express lascivious, obscene, and effeminate gestures in a way of instructing others!—By these means boys will not be improved in any thing that is good, but absolutely ruined in their morals.

“And let no man excuse himself, as having left the theatre, while yet he undertakes to qualify others for the work. You cannot say that the man has ceased from his business, when he provides substitutes in his own place; and furnishes the playhouse with a number of performers instead of one; and teaches them, contrary to the divine ordinances, to confound, in their apparel, the proper and decent distinctions of the sexes; and so gratifies Satan by the defilement of the divine workmanship.—If the man makes poverty his excuse, his necessities

* Deut. xxii. 5.

be relieved in the same manner as those of others, who are maintained by the alms of the Church, provided he be content with frugal and simple food, and do not fancy that we are to hire him, by a salary, to cease from sin; since it is not OUR interest, but HIS OWN, that is concerned in this affair. But,—let his gains by the service of the playhouse be ever so large,—What sort of gain is that, which tears men from a participation in the banquet of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and leads them from their miserable and ruinous feasting in this world to the punishments of eternal famine and thirst? Therefore,—if possible,—recover him from this depravity and infamy to the way of innocence and to the hope of life, that he may be content with a parsimonious, but salutary maintenance from the Church. And, if your Church be insufficient to maintain its own poor*, he may transfer himself to us;—and he shall here receive what is necessary for food and raiment:—He must, however, no longer teach his pernicious lessons; but himself endeavour to learn something from the Church that may be useful to his salvation. Dearest son, I wish you constant prosperity †.”

The decision of Cyprian is, doubtless, that, which piety and good sense would unite to dictate in the case.—A player was ever an infamous character at Rome; and was looked on as incapable of filling any of the offices of state. The Romans, at the same time that they showed, in this point, the soundness of their political, evinced the depravity of their moral, sense: For there were still maintained by them, at the public expense and for the public amusement, a company of men, who,—they knew,—must of necessity be dissolute and dangerous members of society. If this was the judgment of sober pagans, we need not wonder that the purity of

* Eucratius was the bishop of a place called Thensæ, lying in the military road to Carthage.

† Ep. 61. Pam.

Christianity would not even suffer such characters to be admitted into the bosom of the Church at all. To say, that there are noble sentiments to be found in some dramas, answers not the purpose of those, who would vindicate the entertainments of the stage. The support of them requires a SYSTEM in its own nature corrupt;—a system, which must gratify the voluptuous and the libidinous, or it can have no durable existence. Hence, in every age, complaints have been made of the licentiousness of the stage; and the necessity of keeping it under proper restraints and regulations has been admitted by its greatest admirers. But it is, I think, a great mistake to suppose that the stage may remain a favourite amusement, and, at the same time, be so regulated as not to offend the modest eyes and ears of a humble Christian. The gravest advocates for the theatre expect pleasure from it rather than instruction: If, therefore, you believe that human nature is corrupt and impure, only ask yourself what sort of dramatic exhibitions and conversations will be most likely to meet with the applause of the people;—and you will soon be led to conclude, that the playhouse is and must be a school of impurity.

The first Christians felt the force of this obvious argument, and they rejected the stage entirely.—A Christian, renouncing the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and yet frequenting the playhouse, was with them a solecism.—The EFFUSION of the Holy Spirit, which, during three centuries, we are now reviewing, never admitted these amusements at all.—The profession of the dramatic art, and the profession of Christianity, were held to be absolutely inconsistent with each other.

It is one of the main designs of this History to show, practically, what true Christians were, both in principles and in manners: and, in this view, the case before us is exceedingly instructive.—What would Cyprian have said had he seen large assemblies

Christians, so called, devoted to these impurities, and supporting them with all their might, and deriving from them the highest delight? — “Such persons must, certainly, be strangers to the joy of the Holy Ghost; and I cannot but wonder why they choose to retain the name of Christians.” — Then, if he had examined their stage entertainments, and compared them with those that were in vogue in his own day, — Would he not have seen the same confusion of sexes, — the same encouragement of unchaste desires, and the same sensuality, with the same contemptuous ridicule of Christianity? — if, indeed, in his time the Gospel was ever burlesqued on a stage, as it has frequently been in ours. — In some points of lesser consequence, the ancient drama might differ from the modern; but, on the whole, the spirit and tendency was the same; and, doubtless, this excellent bishop would have been astonished to be told, that in a country which called itself Christian, actors and actresses and managers of playhouses amassed large sums of money; — that many exemplary clergymen could scarcely find subsistence; and, that theologians of great erudition enlisted in the service of the stage, and obtained applause by writing comments on dramatic poets.

There was a bishop of Assuræ, named Fortunatus, who had lapsed in the time of persecution, and who, without any marks of repentance, still assumed to himself the episcopal character, and insisted on his being received as such by the clergy and people. This case produced an epistle of Cyprian to the Church*, in which he as strenuously opposes the ambitious claims of the bishop as, in similar circumstances, he had formerly done those of the laity; and he repeats the advice which he had before given to the lapsed, and cautions the people against the reception of him in his former rank and station. — Behold now the strenuous assertor of the right of

* Epis. 6.

faithful bishops openly exposing the pretensions of unworthy ones, and instructing the people to guard themselves against such delusions! What effect his epistle had, does not appear: The weight of his character, and the vigour of the discipline then happily prevalent in Africa, make it probable that it had the desired success.

Rogatian, an African bishop, complained to Cyprian and his colleagues assembled in a Synod, of the insolent and injurious behaviour of a deacon. Cyprian observes, that he might have done himself justice without taking this step.—He applies the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to this of the haughty deacon, and takes notice very properly of the humble and unassuming carriage of our Lord toward the impious dignitaries of the Jewish Church. “He taught us,” says he, “by his own behaviour towards false pastors, how true ones ought to be fully and regularly honoured.”

The following passage is, perhaps, the most striking proof of any in Cyprian’s writings, that the ideas of episcopacy were too lofty, even in that age, and that they had insensibly grown with the gradual increase of superstition.—Let it be remarked as a character of the spirit of those times; and as an instance of the effect of that spirit on a mind the most pure and humble.

“Deacons ought to remember that the Lord chose Apostles, that is, bishops and rulers; but that the Apostles, after HIS ascent into heaven, chose to themselves deacons, as the ministers of their government and of the Church. Now if we dare do any thing against God who makes bishops, then may DEACONS dare to act against us by whom they are appointed.”

Even the least offensive part of this comparison is very unseemly: Bishops are, by no means, to be considered in the same light as Apostles.—His next observation is, however, strictly just: “These are

the beginnings of heresies, and the attempts of ill-disposed schismatics to please themselves, and to despise with haughtiness their superiors." He proceeds to advise the bishop how to act concerning a turbulent deacon; and he does this with that happy mixture of firmness and charity, of which, by a peculiarly intuitive discernment, he seldom failed to show himself a master*.

Geminus Victor, by his will, appointed Faustinus, a presbyter, a guardian. In an African synod, Cyprian and his colleagues wrote to the Church of Furnæ† a protest against the practice.—The clergy were then looked on as men wholly devoted to divine things: secular cares were taken out of their hands as much as possible.—Let this fact, also, be noted as one of the happy effects of the work of the Holy Ghost on the Church.

Novatianism had spread into Gaul; and Marcian, bishop of the Church of Arelate, united himself to the schism. Faustinus, bishop of Lyons, and several other French bishops, wrote to Stephen of Rome on this subject. Faustinus wrote, also, concerning the same matter, to Cyprian of Carthage; who, in a letter to Stephen, supported the cause of the general Church against the schismatics.—These facts are mentioned, for the purpose of showing how the Gospel, which had so gloriously begun at Lyons in the second century, must now have spread in France to a great degree.—Contentions and schisms usually have no place, till after Christianity has taken deep root.

The same observation may be made respecting the progress of Christianity in Spain; where, by the inscriptions of Cyriac of Ancona, it appears that the light of truth had entered in Nero's time. Two Spanish bishops, Basilides and Martial, had deservedly lost their pastoral offices in the Church, on account of their unfaithfulness in the persecution. Cyprian and his colleagues in council wrote to con-

* Epis. 66.

† Epis. 67.

firm their deposition: He shows that the people, no less than the clergy, were bound to abstain from communion with such characters; and he supports his argument by the directions of Moses to the children of Israel, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men." He recommends*—that ordinations should be performed in the sight of all the people, that they might all have an opportunity to approve or to condemn the characters of the persons ordained. He takes notice—that, in Africa, the neighbouring bishops used to meet in the place where the new bishop was to be ordained; and, that there he was chosen in the presence of the people themselves, who knew fully the life and conversation of every candidate. He observes—that Sabinus, who had been substituted in the room of Basilides, had been ordained in this fair and equitable manner: and he censures Basilides for going to Rome, and for gaining by deceit, the consent of Stephen to his being re-instated in his former dignity. Cyprian thinks—that his guilt was much aggravated by this conduct; and in regard to Martial, who, it seems, had defiled himself with Pagan abominations, he insists,—that his deposition ought to remain confirmed.

While these things show the unhappy spirit of human depravity bearing down the most wholesome fences of discipline, they evince, that there existed persons at that time in the Christian world, who exerted themselves,—and that not without success,—to preserve the purity of the Church. And, if ever it should please God to affect, with due care and zeal, the hearts of those, who possess the power to reform our own ecclesiastical defects and abuses, better guides and precedents than these,—next to the Scriptures,—will scarcely be found.

Pupian's
letter,

A. D.

254,

In the year two hundred and fifty-four, Pupian, Christian of distinction in Carthage, by letter

* Epis. 68.

causing
priest.

accused Cyprian of ruling the Church with imperious sway; and of ejecting members from it with great insolence and haughtiness. The African prelate had presided now during six years, and had signalized himself, equally in persecution and in peace, as the friend of piety, order, and discipline, and had exerted himself, in the use of every temporal and spiritual faculty, solely for the good of the falling and distempered Church: he saw, by this time, the great success of his labours; and, it now behoved him to pay the tax, which eminent virtue ever does pay to slander and to envy.—A tax, no doubt, exceedingly irksome and distressing;—nevertheless, necessary to prevent the risings of pride, and to preserve the most eminent Christian humble before his God. Pupian believed, or affected to believe very unjust rumours, which were circulated against his pastor; and said, that the scruple of conscience, with which he was seized, prevented him from owning the authority of Cyprian. He himself had suffered during the persecution, and had been faithful; but, like Lucian, whom he, probably, resembled both in virtues and weaknesses, he was disgusted at the backwardness of Cyprian in receiving the lapsed. This malcontent heavily complained of his severity, while the Novatian party had separated from their bishop on account of his lenity. The best and wisest characters have ever been most exposed to such inconsistent charges. It does not appear that Pupian was able to raise a second sect of dissenters on opposite grounds to those of the first: and we may hope that he reflected on his error, and returned into a state of reconciliation with his bishop. A few extracts from Cyprian's answer,—for we have not Pupian's letter,—may throw still stronger light on the temper and principles of Cyprian, and afford us some salutary reflections.

To the charge of Pupian—that he was not pos-

sessed of humility, he answers thus: "Which of us is most deficient in humility?—I, who daily serve the brethren; and who, with kindness and pleasure, receive every one who comes to the Church; or you, who constitute yourself the bishop of the bishop, and the judge of the judge appointed by God for a certain time? The Lord, in the Gospel, when it was said to him, 'Answerest thou the high priest so?' still preserving the respect due to the sacerdotal character, said nothing against the high priest, but only cleared his own innocence: and St. Paul, though he might have been justified in using strong language against those who had crucified the Lord, yet answers, 'I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest; for it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.'

"Unless, indeed, you will say—that before the persecution, when you were in communion with me, I was your pastor; but that after the persecution I ceased to be so.—I suppose, then, the persecution exalted you to the high honour of a witness for Christ; and, at the same time, depressed me from my office by a heavy proscription;—yet,—the very edict, which proscribed me, acknowledged my rank as a bishop*: Thus, even those, who believed not God who appoints the bishop, credited the devil who proscribed him.

"I speak not these things in a way of boasting, but with grief; since you set yourself up as a judge of God and his Christ, who says to the Apostles,—and, of consequence, to all the bishops, the successors of the Apostles,—'He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me'.—Hence heresies and schism arise and must arise, whenever persons presumptuously despise the authority of the bishop, who alone is the president of the Church.—What arrogance is this,—to call pastors to YOUR

* The edict ran thus—"Whoever shall hold or possess any part of the goods of Cæcilius Cyprian, bishop of the Christians," &c.

cognizance; and unless they be acquitted at your bar,—behold,—the brethren must be pronounced to have been without a bishop for the last six years!

“You say your scruples must be solved:—but, Why did not those martyrs, who, full of the Holy Ghost,—suffered for God and his Christ;—Why did not many of my colleagues, and many of the people, who have been illustrious for their sufferings, indulge similar scruples? Must all—as you affirm—who have communicated with me, be considered as polluted, and as having lost the hope of eternal life?—Pupian alone is upright,—inviolable,—holy,—chaste: he must not mix with us: he must dwell solitary in paradise!!”

He then exhorts him to return to the bosom of the Church: but at the same time he informs him, that, in the matter of his re-admission, he shall be guided by intimations and admonitions from the Lord, communicated to him possibly by visions and dreams.—This is a language not unusual in Cyprian: but we know too little of the mode of dispensation which the Church, at that time, was under, to judge accurately concerning it:—certainly the age of miracles had not then ceased: and, certainly, instruction by dreams was very much the method used by God in Scripture:—To reject, therefore, wholly the positive declarations of a man of Cyprian’s wisdom and veracity, would be inexcusable temerity.—He, repeatedly, speaks of the Lord’s directions revealed to him in the manner above mentioned. If some expressions in the letter be allowed to favour of episcopal haughtiness, which was then growing in the Church, the main tenor of it, nevertheless, contains nothing but what Pupian ought to have attended to most seriously. A readiness to believe stories, which tend to calumniate the worthiest pastors, is a snare which Satan has too successfully laid for the members of the Church in all ages: and, doubtless, much greater circumspection is required on this head, than many are disposed to pay. The brotherly

fellowship of Churches depends, in a great measure, on their endeavours to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Cyprian concludes in this nervous manner: "I have written these things with a pure conscience, and in the firm reliance on my God.—You have my letters; I have yours; both will be recited in the day of judgment before the tribunal of Christ*."

A controversy now arose among Christians, while the pacific spirit of Valerian continued to protect them, which reflects no honour on any of the parties concerned in it. The question was, whether persons returning from heresies into the Church ought to be re-baptized? The active spirit of Cyprian was employed, partly by a council in Africa, and partly by his letters, in maintaining that the baptism of heretics was null and void; and that even Novatian baptism ought to be looked upon in the same light. Stephen, bishop of Rome, maintained, that, if persons had been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, imposition of hands would then be sufficient for their reception into the Church: The point was left undecided, because no party had power to compel others; most Christians, however, have long since agreed with Stephen; and, indeed, it is the voice of good sense as well as of the Church of England,—that the efficacy of a Sacrament, rightly administered, depends not on the character of him that ministers it. But the respect which Cyprian, not undeservedly, had acquired by his labours, his sufferings, and his abilities, procured him a much greater degree of strength than either the importance of his cause or the weight of his arguments merited. Even Firmilian of Cappadocia, in a long letter, supported his side of the question.—This bishop, occasionally, adverts to the case of a woman, who, about twenty-two years before the date of his letter, had professed herself a prophetess;

Controversy respecting re-baptisation.

* Epis. 69.

for a long time had deceived the brethren with her ecstatic raptures, till one of the exorcists confuted her pretensions. It may be worth while just to have mentioned this fact, as it shows that delusions have ever been raised by Satan to disgrace the work of God. It appears by the same letter*,—that Stephen behaved with much violence and asperity in the contest;—that he did not even admit to a conference the brethren who came to him from distant parts, if they happened to be of Cyprian's opinion;—but that he denied them the common rights of hospitality. —In the course of this controversy Cyprian decided, and certainly with much propriety,—that those†, whose weak state of health did not permit them to be washed in water, were yet sufficiently baptized by being sprinkled:—He observes, that the virtue of baptism ought not to be estimated, in a carnal manner, by the quantity of external apparatus.

How weak, alas, is man!—A peace of three years has set the members of the Church in a flame among themselves,—and for a matter of trifling import!—And one of the best and wisest men of his day, by zeal for unity, and by caution against innovations, is betrayed into the support of an indefensible point of mere ceremony, which tends to the encouragement of superstition and the weakening of brotherly love!—How soon do we forget that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost!”—With what difficulty is the real love of Jesus and its fruits preserved among professors of Christianity! All this proves in the strongest manner,—how mighty and gracious the Lord is in still preserving a Church in the earth;—how dark and corrupt is man;—how active and subtile is Satan;—how precious is that blood which cleanses from all sin;—and how true is that book which contains these salutary doctrines and faithfully describes the misery of man!—How safely may we

* Epis. 75.

† Epis. 76.

rely on the way of salvation which it teaches; and how pleasing is the prospect which it exhibits of the Church in heaven!

The reader would justly think the time ill-employed in unravelling the niceties of this trifling controversy.—Besides, our attention is called to more important matter:—God prepares a scourge for his froward children: Persecution lowers again with renewed strength; and Christians are called on—to forget their idle internal squabbles,—to humble themselves before HIM,—and to prepare for fresh scenes of horror and desolation.

CHAP. XIV.

THE LAST ACTS AND MARTYRDOM OF CYPRIAN.

THE change in the disposition of Valerian towards the Christians, which took place about the year of our Lord two hundred and fifty-seven, is one of the most memorable instances of the instability of human characters. In kindness to them he had surpassed all his predecessors. Even from Philip they had not experienced so much courtesy and friendship. His palace had, usually, been full of the followers of Jesus, and was looked on as a sanctuary. But now, after he had reigned three years, he was induced, by his favourite, Macrianus, to commence a deadly persecution. This man dealt largely in magical enchantments and abominable sacrifices; he slaughtered children, and tore out the intestines of new-born babes*. The persecution of Christians was a cruel employment, worthy of a mind so fascinated with diabolical wickedness and folly; and he found in Valerian but too prompt a disciple. This fresh attack on the servants of Christ began in the year two hundred and fifty-seven, and continued during

VIIIth Per-
secution,
A. D.
257.

* Dionysius of Alex.—Euseb. B. 7. C. 10.

the remainder of the reign of this emperor;—namely, three years and a half. Stephen of Rome appears to have died a natural death about the beginning of it: For, there is no evidence of his martyrdom; and, therefore, we want the proofs which might, in that case, have been afforded, whether his turbulent and aspiring spirit was really combined with genuine Christian affections.—He was succeeded by Sixtus.

Cyprian, who had escaped two persecutions, was now made the victim of the third,—though by slow degrees, and with circumstances of comparative lenity. Every thing relating to him is so interesting, that it may not be amiss to prosecute his story, in a connected manner, to his death; and to reserve the narrative of other objects of this persecution till afterwards.

He was seized by the servants of Paternus the proconsul of Carthage, and brought into his council-chamber. “The sacred emperors, Valerian and Gallienus,” says Paternus, “have done me the honour to direct letters to me, in which they have decreed, that all men ought to adore the gods whom the Romans adore; and on pain of being slain with the sword if they refuse. I have heard that you despise the worship of the gods;—whence I advise you to consult for yourself and to honour them.” “I am a Christian,” replied the prelate, “and know no god but the one true God, who created heaven and earth, the sea, and all things in them. This God we Christians serve: To him we pray night and day for all men, and even for the emperors.” “You will die the death of a malefactor, if you persevere in this disposition of mind*.” “That is a good disposition which fears God,” answered Cyprian, “and therefore it must not be changed.” “It is the will, then, of the princes, that, for the present, you should be banished.” “He is no exile,” replied the bishop, “who has God in his heart, for the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.” Paternus said;

* The passion of Cyprian in Pam. Edit.—Fleury’s Hist. B. 7.

"Before you go, tell me,—where are your presbyters: They are said to be in this city?"—With much presence of mind, Cyprian reminded him of the edicts made by the best Roman princes against the practice of informers: "They ought not, therefore, to be discovered by me; and you yourselves do not approve of men, who offer themselves voluntarily to you." "I will make you discover them by torments." "By me," the intrepid bishop rejoined, "they shall not be discovered." "Our princes have ordered that Christians should hold no conventicles; and whoever breaks this rule shall be put to death." "Do what you are ordered," Cyprian calmly replied.

Paternus, however, was not disposed to hurt Cyprian. Most probably he respected the character of the man, who, by this time, must have been highly esteemed in Africa on account of a shining series of good works. After having made some ineffectual attempts to work on his fears, he sent him into banishment to Curubis, a little town fifty miles from Carthage, situate by the sea, over against Sicily. The place was healthy, the air good, and, by his own desire, he had private lodgings. The citizens of Curubis, during the eleven months which he lived among them, treated him with great kindness; and he was repeatedly visited by the Christians.—In this short interval Paternus died.

While the exiled prelate remained by the sea-side, serving his divine master in holy meditations and useful actions to the best of his power and opportunity, he was informed that the persecutors had seized nine bishops, with several priests and deacons, and a great number of the faithful, even virgins and children; and, after beating them with sticks, had sent them to work in the copper mines among the mountains. Every one of these bishops had been present at the last council of Carthage; their names were Nemesian, Felix, Lucius, a second Felix, Litteus, Polus, Victor, Jader, and Dativus. I cannot account for the milde

treatment which Cyprian received from the Roman governors in any other way than by supposing, that an extraordinary and reverential respect was paid to his superior quality, labours, and virtues. Be that as it may, Providence certainly favoured him in a peculiar manner. But his sympathizing spirit could not but be with his brethren:—His sentiments and his feelings are strongly expressed in a letter to Nemesian and the rest.

“Your glory requires, blessed and beloved brethren, that I ought to come and embrace you, were it not that the confession of the same name has confined me also to this place: but if it be forbidden me to come to you in body, I am present with you in spirit and affection; and I endeavour to express my very soul to you in letters.—How do I exult in your honours, and reckon myself a partner with you,—though not in suffering,—yet in the fellowship of love!—How can I hold my peace, when I hear such glorious things of dearest brethren! How hath the Divine dispensations honoured you! Part of you have already finished the course of martyrdom, and are now receiving crowns of righteousness from the Lord; and the rest, as yet in prisons, or in mines and bonds, exhibit, in the tediousness of their afflictions, still greater examples of patience and perseverance, which will arm and strengthen the brethren, at the same time that these long-continued torments will advance the sufferers to a higher proficiency in Christian glory, and ensure to them a proportional reward in heaven.

“In truth,—that the Lord has thus honoured you, affords me no surprise when I reflect on your blameless lives and faithfulness; your firm adherence to the divine ordinance; your integrity, concord, humility, diligence; mercy in cherishing the poor; constancy in defence of the truth; and strictness of Christian discipline:—And, that nothing might be wanting in you as patterns of good works, even now, by con-

session with the mouth and by suffering with the body, you stir up the minds of the brethren to divine martyrdom, and distinguish yourselves as leaders of eminent goodness; nor do I doubt, but that the flock will imitate their pastors and presidents, and be crowned, in like manner, by our common Lord.—That you have been grievously beaten with clubs, and have been initiated, by that punishment, in Christian confession, is a thing not to be lamented. The body of a Christian trembles not on account of clubs: All his hope is in wood*. The servant of Christ acknowledges the emblem of his salvation: Redeemed by a cross of wood to eternal life, by this wood he is advanced to his crown. O happy feet! shackled indeed at present with fetters; ye will quickly finish a glorious journey to Christ!—Let malice and cruelty bind you as they please, ye will soon pass from earth and its sorrows to the kingdom of heaven.—In the mines ye have not a bed, on which the body may be refreshed;—nevertheless, Christ is your rest and consolation: Your limbs are fatigued with labour and lie on the ground: but, so to lie down, when you have Christ with you, is no punishment.—Filth and dirt defile your limbs, and ye have no baths at hand; but, remember, ye are inwardly washed from all uncleanness.—Your allowance of bread is but scanty; be it so,—man doth not live by bread alone, but by the word of God. Ye have no proper clothes to defend you from the cold;—but he, who has put on Christ, is clothed abundantly.”

He afterwards comforts them, by suitable arguments, under the loss of means of grace and of public worship; and speaks of the Lord as rewarding the patience and fortitude of his saints, which virtues

* I observe once for all,—that the want of a just classical taste like that of the Augustan age, and the excess of false rhetorical ornaments, appear every where in Cyprian's writings. This was not the defect of the man, but of the times: and the meanness of the pun in this place will be forgiven by all, who relish the preciousness of the doctrine connected with it.

are indeed his own work in their hearts. “For it is of him that we conquer; it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”—He shows, hence, the great sin of unbelief—in not trusting him who promises his aid to those who confess him, and in not fearing him who threatens eternal punishment to those who deny him. In conclusion, he begs their earnest prayers,—that he and they may be freed from the snares and the darkness of the world; and that those, who, in the bond of love and peace, had stood together against the injuries of heretics and the pressures of the heathen, might together rejoice in the celestial mansions*.

Nemesian and the other bishops returned him an answer full of affection and gratitude, from three different places in which they were confined; and they acknowledge the pecuniary assistance which he had sent them.

Cyprian wrote also to Rogatian the younger, and to other confessors who were in prison,—most probably at Carthage:—He animates them in his usual manner, “to despise present afflictions through the hope of future joys;” and he speaks with much pleasure of some women and boys who were partners of their sufferings. He recommends to them the example of the elder Rogatian, and of the ever peaceable and sober Felicissimus †, who had consummated their martyrdom already.

Cyprian re-
turns from
exile,

A. D.
257.

In the year two hundred and fifty-seven, Cyprian was permitted to return from exile; and he lived in a garden near Carthage, which was now providentially restored to him, though he had sold it at his first conversion. His liberal spirit would have inclined him once more to sell it for the relief of the needy, if he had not feared lest he should excite the envy of the persecutors. Here he regulated the affairs of

* Epis. 78, 79, 80.

† He thus distinguishes this humble, patient martyr, from the factious character of the same name. Epis. 81.

the Church and distributed to the poor what he had left. He sent messengers to Rome for the purpose of clearing up certain indistinct information which had been received concerning the persecution having broken out afresh; and he immediately communicated to the brethren* the following facts, namely—That Valerian had given orders that bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be put to death without delay;—that senators, noblemen, and knights should be degraded and deprived of their property; and, that if they still persisted in being Christians, they should lose their lives;—that women of quality should be deprived of their property and banished;—and that all Cæsar's freedmen, who should have confessed, should be stripped of their goods, be chained, and sent to work on his estates. These were Valerian's directions to the senate; and he sent letters, to the same effect, to the governors of provinces: "These letters," said Cyprian, "we daily expect to arrive. We stand, however, in the firmness of faith, in patient expectation of suffering, and in humble hope of obtaining, from the Lord's help and kindness, the crown of eternal life." He mentions also the daily ferocity with which,—he understood,—the persecution was carried on at Rome in all its horrors: and, he gives a particular instance of it, in the martyrdom of Xystus the bishop.—He begs that the intelligence may be circulated through Africa; "That we may all think of death; but not more of death than of immortality; and that, in the fulness of faith, we may, rather with joy than with fear, expect the approaching events."

Galerius Maximus had succeeded Paternus in the proconsulate, and Cyprian was daily expected to be sent for. In this awful crisis a number of senators and others, considerable for their offices or their quality, came to him. Ancient friendship melted the minds of some of them towards him;

* Epis. 82.

and they offered to conceal him in country-places; but his soul was now thirsting for martyrdom. The uncertainty of tedious banishment could not be agreeable to one, who had had so much experience of that kind; and, Valerian's law being expressly levelled at men of his character, there seemed little probability left of his being long concealed. Further, I believe the generous temper of this prelate would have been hurt, if the safety of his former pagan friends had been endangered on his account. He might, therefore, hesitate to accept their offers, though, according to the steady maxims of his conscientious prudence, he would, by no means, do any thing to accelerate his own death. Pontius his deacon tells us,—that in opposition to the intemperate zeal of those who were for giving themselves up to martyrdom, Cyprian had always on this head conscientious fears, lest he should displease God by throwing away his life. In fact, he continued still at Carthage, exhorting the faithful, and wishing, that when he should suffer martyrdom, death might find him thus employed in the service of his God. Being informed, however, that the proconsul, then at Utica, had sent soldiers for him, he was induced to comply, for a season, with the advice of his friends, by retiring to some place of concealment, that he might not suffer at Utica, but,—that if he was called to martyrdom,—he might finish his life among his own people at Carthage: So he states the matter in the last of his letters to the clergy and the people. “Here in this concealment, I wait for the return of the proconsul to Carthage, ready to appear before him, and to say what shall be given me at the hour. Do you, dear brethren,—Do you, agreeably to the instructions you have always received from me, continue still and quiet: Let none of you excite any tumult on account of the brethren, or offer himself voluntarily to the Gentiles.—He, who is seized and delivered up, ought to speak: The Lord, who dwells

in us, will speak at that hour: Confession rather than profession is our duty."

The proconsul returned to Carthage, and Cyprian returned to his garden. There he was seized by two officers, who had been sent with soldiers for that purpose. They obliged him to sit between themselves in a chariot; and they conveyed him to a place named Sextus, six miles from Carthage, by the sea-side. The proconsul lodged there on account of indisposition; and he gave orders that Cyprian should be carried back to the house of the chief officer, about the distance of a stadium* from the prætorium; and—that the consideration of the business should be deferred till the next day.—The news spread through Carthage: The celebrity of the bishop, on account of his good works, drew prodigious crowds to the scene; not only of Christians, but of infidels, who revered eminent virtue in distress.

The chief officer guarded him,—but, in a courteous manner; so that he was permitted to have his friends about him as usual. The Christians passed the night in the street before his lodgings; and the benevolence of Cyprian moved him to direct a particular attention to be paid to the young women who were among the multitude. The next day the proconsul sent for Cyprian, who walked to the prætorium attended by a vast concourse of people. The proconsul not yet appearing, he was ordered to wait for him in a private place. He sat down, and being in a great perspiration, a soldier, who had been a Christian, offered him fresh clothes: "Shall we," says Cyprian, "seek a remedy for that which may last no longer than to-day?" The arrival of the proconsul was announced, and this venerable servant of Christ was brought before him into the judgment-hall.—"Are you Thascius Cyprian?" "I am." "Are you HE whom the Christians call their

* A hundred and twenty-five paces.

bishop?" "I am." "Our princes have ordered you to worship the gods." "That I will not do." "You would judge better to consult your safety, and not to despise the gods." "My safety and my strength is Christ the Lord, whom I desire to serve for ever." "I pity your case," says the proconsul, "and could wish to consult for you." "I have no desire," says the prelate, "that things should be otherwise with me, than that I may adore my God, and hasten to him with all the ardour of my soul;—for the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The proconsul grew red with anger; and immediately pronounced sentence of death in the following terms:—"You have lived sacrilegiously a long time; you have formed a society of impious conspirators; you have shown yourself an enemy to the gods and their religion, and have not hearkened to the equitable counsels of our princes; you have ever been a father and a ringleader of the impious sect.—You shall, therefore, be an example to the rest,—that, by the shedding of your blood, they may learn their duty. Let Thascius Cyprian, who refuses to sacrifice to the gods, be put to death by the sword." "God be praised!" said the martyr; and while they were leading him away, a multitude of the people followed and cried, "Let us die with our holy bishop."

Execution
of Cyprian,

A. D.

258.

A troop of soldiers attended the martyr; and the officers marched on each side of him. They led him into a plain surrounded with trees, and many climbed up to the top of them, to see him at a distance. Cyprian took off his mantle, and fell on his knees and worshipped his God: then he put off his inner garment and remained in his shirt.—The executioner being come, Cyprian ordered twenty-five golden denarii to be given to him: he himself bound the napkin over his own eyes; and a presbyter and a deacon tied his hands, and the Christians placed

before him napkins and handkerchiefs to receive his blood.—His head was then severed from his body by the sword*.

His biographer Pontius represents himself as wishing to have died with him: and, as divided between the joy of his victorious martyrdom, and sorrow, that himself was left behind.

Thus,—after an eventful and instructive period of about twelve years since his conversion,—after a variety of toils and exercises among friends, and open foes and nominal Christians, by a death more gentle than commonly fell to the lot of martyrs, rested at length in Jesus the truly magnanimous and benevolent spirit of Cyprian of Carthage.—An extraordinary personage, surely! And one, whose character calls for the most distinct review and illustration in our power.—An attempt of this sort we would make in the next chapter, however imperfect, or inadequate it may prove.—Let writers, whose views are secular, celebrate their heroes, their statesmen, and their philosophers; but let us,—even though a Christian's taste be derided,—at least take advantage of the rare felicity of the present times of civil liberty, and endeavour, in employing the press, to do some justice to the virtues of men, who, while they lived, “set their affections on things above,” and who, after death,—according to modern sentiments of worth and excellence,—are, almost, assigned to contemptuous oblivion.—And, may their memorial be blessed for ever!!

CHAP. XV.

CYPRIAN COMPARED WITH ORIGEN.

THE east and the west beheld at the same time these two men, in talents, activity, and attainments much superior to the rest of the Christian world. The

* Acts of his Martyrdom. Passion of Cyprian in Pam. Pontius's Life of Cyprian, and Fleury's History.

Roman seems, beyond contradiction, to have much excelled the Grecian in those things in which true Christian virtue consists ; yet, as the latter, by the **FRUITS** of his life,—though they were miserably tarnished and clouded by a depraved philosophy,—still claims a just place among saints, it may answer some valuable purpose, not impertinent to the design of this History, to compare, in several particulars, the respective endowments, defects, and excellencies of these extraordinary men.

1. There may have been as pious and holy men as Cyprian, in the interval of time between the Apostles and him, but we have no opportunity of knowing any other Christian so well. The distinct particularity of the accounts concerning him makes his character remarkably deserving of our attention. The dealings of God with a sinner, at his first conversion, often give a strong tincture to the whole future life. Cyprian was intended for very great and important services in the Church ; and, those—of an active nature, and attended with an almost uninterrupted series of sufferings ;—such as no man could perform to the glory of God, but one, who knew assuredly the ground on which he stood, by a strong work of the Divine Spirit on his soul. His experience in conversion he himself describes in his letter to Donatus.—His reception of Christianity was not the effect of mere reasoning or speculation. It was not carried on in a scholastic or philosophical manner, but may truly be said to have been “in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” He felt the doctrines of the Gospel,—namely, the grace of God ; forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ ; and the influence of the Holy Ghost,—powerful, exuberant, and victorious. His soul was brought into the love of God, and that of the purest kind, tempered ever with humility and godly fear : and it is evident—that he always saw the work to be of God, and beheld nothing in himself as wise, holy, and glorious ; and

that a spirit of thankfulness for redeeming love, of simple dependence on the divine promises, and, of steady charity to God and man, was the result. His race was of no long duration; only about twelve years; and by far the greater part of the time he was bishop of Carthage. He lived a Christian life; and no part of it was exempt from much labour or much affliction. He seems never to have known what it was to settle into a lukewarm state. The fire which was first kindled in him, burnt serene and steady to the end of his days.—I am aware that Mosheim charges him with an ambitious, domineering spirit, that invaded the rights of the lower clergy and people*. But I take the liberty of assuring the cautious reader, that this excellent and very judicious **SECULAR** historian, is not to be trusted in his accounts of men of **REAL HOLINESS**. From the most attentive review which I have been able to make of the character of the African prelate, by a repeated perusal of the existing evidence, especially his epistles, I cannot see any thing on which to ground such a censure. He did nothing, in general, without the clergy and people. He was ever sedulous in promoting the good of the whole. The episcopal authority was, in his time, at no very blameable height in the Church: nevertheless, through the gradual growth of superstition, it was, naturally, advancing to an excess of dignity; and it is not to be denied that some few expressions savouring of haughtiness and asperity are to be found in the writings of Cyprian.—But these few expressions were evidently the effect of particular provocation;—nor is there the least evidence that ambition was his vice. Candour would rather say, he was, in general, influenced by a very fervent zeal, supported in its exertions by a temper remarkably active and sanguine. But, whoever looks into the original records with an expectation of finding any thing selfish, proud, or domineering in his

* Eccles. History, Century III. Chap. 2.

general conduct, will be disappointed; and, on the contrary, will be struck with the steady tenor of gentleness, charity, and humility. In fine, if he had not been a CHRISTIAN, one might have held him forth to the world as a GREAT man;—if it be the part of a great man to unite, in a large and capacious mind, many virtues, and each of them in a high degree of perfection;—virtues too, which are opposite in their nature, and which rarely meet in firm consistence in the same subject;—for example, vigour and mildness, magnanimity and mercy, fortitude and prudence, warmth of temper and accuracy of judgment, and, above all,—zeal and discretion.

In Origen's conversion we see nothing remarkable. He received Christianity in a way of education, rather than by quick, lively, and decisive operations of the Holy Spirit. It is not usual with God to make use of SUCH persons for extraordinary services, like those for which Cyprian, in the prime of life, appears to have been selected from the world. Origen's views of the peculiar truths of Christianity were,—to say no more, too faint and general;—nor ever SUFFICIENTLY distinguished from moral and philosophical religion. He bore persecution, when young, with much zeal and honesty; but he lived many years in peace and prosperity. Much respected and sought after by philosophers, highly esteemed and honoured by courts and by the great, he lived a scholastic rather than an active life in the Church; always fully employed indeed, but more like a man of letters than a minister of the Gospel; ever bent on promoting truth and holiness so far as he knew them; but always leaving one's mind dissatisfied on account of the defectiveness of his views. His last scenes are the most satisfactory and the most decisively Christian. He suffered persecution with the patience and honesty of a martyr; and proved INDEED whose disciple he was on the whole. Mosheim charges him with dishonesty in

his arguments against Celsus ; and says, that any one that has penetration and judgment may discern it *. It would have been more to the purpose to have pointed out the instances of dishonest argumentation, which he alludes to. My examination of the tract in question induces me to dissent from this learned historian ; and further, I am convinced that great uprightness of mind was a ruling feature in Origen's character.—But it is not the practice of modern writers to be candid in their judgment of the ancient Christians.

After this general review of these two men, and, after it has been admitted that integrity and fairness of mind were possessed by both in a very great degree, it may be natural to ask—In what consisted the superior excellence of Cyprian?—The general answer to such an inquiry is—The manner of their first conversion has appeared to have been strikingly different in the two cases ; and still more so—The work of God upon their hearts afterwards.—But besides this,—

2. Cyprian was possessed of a simplicity of TASTE to which Origen seems ever to have been a stranger. By simplicity of taste I mean here a genuine and unadulterated relish for the doctrine and spirit of the Christian religion, just as it stands in its real nature. It is possible for a person very eminent in this gift,—which is purely divine and spiritual,—to be, in no way, remarkable for his knowledge of evangelical truth : In respect of knowledge he may not much exceed another who is far his inferior in the former grace of the Spirit : The light and means of information are very different in different ages of the Church ; and it is evident that the third century suffered a decline in illumination. But where a man is deficient in knowledge, yet if his simplicity of Christian taste be very great, he will be silent on those subjects which he does not understand, or at

* Mosheim's Eccl. History, Century III. Chap. 3.

least he will be extremely cautious in opposing any part of divine truth. This was Cyprian's case. He appears not, for instance, to have understood the doctrine of the election of grace. Since Justin's days the knowledge of that article of faith was departing from the Church.—But, he opposed it not.—Origen, less humble and less submissive to divine instruction, and feeling more resources in his reasoning powers, dares to oppose it by a contrary statement*.

In Cyprian this simplicity appears in a supreme degree.—He never trifles with Scripture, or sets up his reason against it. Unencumbered with the apparatus of Grecian philosophy, and possessed of what is much better,—plain good sense, he takes, always, the words of Scripture in their obvious, and most natural meaning; and thinks he has sufficiently proved his point, when he has supported it by an apposite quotation. His humble spirit bows to the divine word: and hence faith, patience, charity, heavenly-mindedness, have full dominion in his soul; and hence also, his sentiments have a strength, a purity, a perspicuity, peculiarly the property of those whose religious taste is altogether scriptural. Here it is that Cyprian and Origen are diametrically opposite to each other. The latter is full of endless allegorical interpretations, and of platonic notions concerning the soul of the world, the transmigration of spirits, free-will, and the pre-existence of souls. The first and simple sense of Scripture he too often ventures to reject entirely†. David's sin in the affair of Uriah he cannot admit. It seems, he had not such strong and palpable proof of his own innate depravity, as to suppose it possible for so good a man to fall so foully. He has recourse, therefore, to a hidden and abstruse sense. His numberless comments on Scripture constitute a system of fanciful allegory, which pervades the whole of the sacred

* Philocalia xxi.

† Philoc. Chap. 1. page 20.

oracles: The just and plain sense is much neglected; and the whole is covered with thick clouds of mysticism and chimerical philosophy. He labours, it is true, to support the faith, which was once delivered to the saints; but, like his platonic master, Ammonius, he introduces large quantities of figurative trash, which will not incorporate with Christian doctrine.—Thus, by accommodating his interpretations to the then reigning literary taste, he gained to himself, indeed, a celebrity of character among the heathen, even among the great and noble, but threw all things into inextricable ambiguity.—His quickness of parts and his superior ingenuity served only to entangle him more effectually, and to enable him to move in the chaos of his own formation with an ease and rapidity that rendered him unconscious of the difficulties in which he had involved himself.

One remarkable consequence of this difference of character was, that while Origen, among the pagans, succeeded in gaining the favour of the great, and was heard by them with patience, Cyprian could not be endured in his preaching or writings,—except by real Christians.—Another consequence is this,—It is no easy thing to vindicate the soundness of the former in Christian principles:—The latter challenges the severest scrutiny.—He is christian throughout.

Such is the difference between a man of simplicity and a man of philosophy and religion; and the mind, on this occasion, is led to compare the effect of a philosophical and of a philological spirit. Origen had the former, Cyprian the latter. Eloquence was his distinguishing accomplishment; and he possessed all the powers of it in a very high degree, according to the taste of the age,—which was far from being the best. And here, I would humbly submit to the consideration of the pious and well-disposed,—whether the knowledge of grammar, history, criti-

cism, and of oratory, theoretical and practical, properly regulated by common sense and in subordination to divine grace, be not much less dangerous, and, in their way, more useful endowments for a minister of Christ, than deep researches into philosophy of any kind?—Far, very far, from meaning to insinuate that the studies of metaphysics and of natural philosophy should be entirely excluded from the education of persons, who mean to be pastors,—I would be understood to suggest,—that a less proportion of THESE, and a greater proportion of THOSE than what agrees with the present fashionable taste, might be more advantageous to the Church. The reasoning powers might find in the former an useful exercise and improvement, without the same danger of presumption which so strongly adheres to the latter *.

3. Having compared the lives and the tempers of these men, let us now view the PRINCIPLES of each. Of Cyprian, after the many quotations already given from his writings, little need be added. Nevertheless, as it has lain more in our way to consider him as addressing Christians than pagans or infidels, I shall select a letter of his to Demetrian, a persecutor of Christians in Africa, in which his manner of preaching to men altogether profane and unconverted is observable.

He denounces to them the plain threatenings of eternal punishment. “There remains hereafter † an eternal prison, constant flame, and perpetual punishment. There the groans of supplicants will not be heard, because here they disregarded the terror of God’s indignation.” He bids them solemnly look into themselves, and appeals to the conscience as affording full proof of guilt before God. And

* These sentiments are certainly favoured by the comparison of Cyprian and Origen.—It is true, this is only a single instance of such comparison:—but, I believe, it will be very difficult to find examples of a contrary tendency.

† Pam. ad Demetrian.

he aggravates the charge of condemnation, because, amidst the MISERIES of the times, men did not repent. After exposing the folly of idolatry, and exhibiting, in lively colours, the all-important scenes of the last judgment, he concludes with this Christian exhortation, which is introduced in the true taste and order of things, after he had first denounced the terrors of the law. “ Provide then for your security and life, while you may. We offer you the most salutary counsel ; and because we are forbidden to hate you or to requite evil, we exhort you, while there is time, to please God and to emerge from the profound night of superstition into the fair light of true religion. We envy not your advantages, nor do we hide the divine benefits. We return good will for your hatred ; and, for the torments and punishments, which are inflicted upon us, we show you the paths of salvation.—Believe, and live ; and do ye, who persecute us for a time, rejoice with us for ever. When you depart hence, there will be no room for repentance : no method of being reconciled to God : here, eternal life is either lost or secured ; here, by the worship of God and the fruit of faith, provision is made for eternal salvation :—and let no man be retarded, either by his sins or by his years, from coming to obtain it. No repentance is too late, while a man remains in this world.

“ An access lies open to the grace of God ; and, to those, who seek and understand the truth, the access is easy. Even, in the very exit of life, pray for remission of sins, and implore the only living and true God with confession and faith : Pardon is granted to him who confesses his sin ; and saving grace from the divine goodness is conferred on the believer ; and, thus may a man pass from death to immortality in his very last moments. By subduing death through the trophy of his cross, by redeeming the believer with the price of his blood, by reconciling

man to God the Father, and by quickening the dead with celestial regeneration, Christ imparts to us these great mercies. HIM, if it be possible, let us all follow ;—let us be baptized in his name. HE opens to us the way of life ; he brings us back to paradise. He leads us to the heavenly kingdom : and we shall always live with him. By him made sons of God, we shall rejoice with him for ever : Redeemed by his blood, we shall be Christians with Christ in glory : we shall be the blessed of God the Father ; and shall give him thanks to all eternity.—The man, who was obnoxious to death, and has been made a sure partaker of immortality, cannot but be filled with joy and gratitude for evermore.”

With such an affectionate spirit, and with such clearness of doctrine did Cyprian preach justification, BY FAITH ONLY, to the unconverted. It must not be denied,—that, in his address to men, who had already “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” there is not the same degree of evangelical purity. In his treatise on Good Works, he says very excellent things on the duty of alms-giving : but he sometimes uses language that might easily be construed into the language of merit ; and as he had not learnt to distinguish the Apocrypha from the Old Testament, he supports his ideas with quotations from Tobit and Ecclesiasticus. WE have had,—what he had not,—an experience of the evil tendency of any expressions which, in the smallest degree, countenance the supposition of the efficacy of human WORKS in washing away the pollution of sin, whether contracted before or after baptism. WE know too, from the dependence on divine grace and on the Spirit’s illumination, which Cyprian and many other fathers of the same stamp habitually exercised,—besides the testimony of their holy lives,—that the same expressions mean not with them what they do in the mouths of moderns, who too often appear to be full of self-righteousness and of contempt both of the grace of Christ and of the

work of the Holy Ghost. We are sure, that the former mean no opposition to the free gift of God, because they are humble: whereas, it is but too evident that the latter do,—because they are proud, and scorn the whole work of the Spirit of God in the formation of the new creature. It had been well, however, if holy men had never given a handle to the profane to adulterate the doctrines of the Gospel. But I have before observed, that Cyprian's views of grace were not equally clear with those of the first Christians: Yet, in every fundamental principle, he speaks as the Oracles of God; and in his addresses to Pagans, Christians, or Jews, he is always fervent and zealous. His tract on Patience, as a practical performance, and that on the Lord's Prayer, as a doctrinal one, deserve the highest praise. In general, his works are excellent in their kind, and he must have a poor taste indeed in godliness who will not find the perusal of them refreshing to his soul. Nevertheless, Cyprian shines much more in practical than in speculative divinity. The shortness of his Christian life and the pressure of his employments will easily account for this.

I wish it were as easy to clear the doctrinal character of Origen from reproach. The ancients themselves were much divided in their views of his opinion concerning the Son of God. It is certain that the Arians of the fourth century seemed to receive some countenance from him; and men, who had so very little assistance from precedents, were glad to catch at the shadow of an argument drawn from his illustrious name.—But what, if his Arianism were indeed full and confessed on all hands,—What would such a fact avail as an argument,—I say, not against the Scriptures,—but against the joint consent of the whole Church for three hundred years? Even the very opposition made against his character by many, shows how zealous the Church had ever been in the defence of the doctrine of the Trinity.—Here

is open a wide field of controversy; but little profit is to be expected from traversing it.—The writings of Origen against Celsus, in which he ably defends Christianity against philosophy and paganism, and the *Philocalia* of the same author, furnish sufficiently decisive passages against Arian tenets,—if they were not embarrassed by others of a more doubtful cast.

It is probable, however, that one who thought so rapidly, wrote so much, and had his eyes so steadily fixed on his philosophy, must have dropped many things, which he would not have seriously maintained if he had ever carefully reviewed them. That he never meant to hold any thing different from the orthodox creed, may be inferred from the pains which he took against heretics, as well as from his general character. Some, therefore, of his indefensible sentences ought to be considered as containing queries and conjectures rather than settled opinions. Athanasius must be allowed to have been a judge of this matter; and HE believed him to be sound, and quoted his writings to prove our Lord's co-eternity and co-essentiality with the Father. And he, likewise, observes—that what things Origen wrote by way of controversy and disputation are not to be looked on as his own* sentiments.

After all, the best defence of this great man consists in the general holiness of his life, and in his patient suffering for the faith of Christ in old age: And I rejoice that, amidst all the trash with which his writings abound, we have yet this unquestionable testimony—that he kept the commandments of God, and had the faith of Jesus. The loss of his voluminous commentaries, and of his other numerous works, is, perhaps, not much to be regretted. There are two sentences† in them which merit particular attention. He thus speaks on the words, Rom. iii. “we

* Cave's Life of Origen.

† See Bishop Beveridge on the Articles of the Church of England.

conclude, that a man is justified by faith," &c. "THE JUSTIFICATION OF FAITH ONLY IS SUFFICIENT; SO THAT IF ANY PERSON ONLY BELIEVE, HE MAY BE JUSTIFIED, THOUGH NO GOOD WORK HATH BEEN FULFILLED BY HIM;"—and again, on the case of the penitent thief, "he was justified by faith without the works of the law; because, concerning these, the Lord did not inquire what he had done before; neither did he stay to ask what work he was purposing to perform after he had believed;—but, the man being justified by his confession only, Jesus, who was going to paradise, took him as a companion, and carried him there."

Thus, the precious doctrine of justification, though much sullied and covered with rubbish, was yet alive, in the third century, even in the faith of the most dubious characters among the Anti-Nicene fathers. This it was that kept Origen, with all "his hay and stubble*," firm on Christian foundations, and distinguished him radically from an adversary of Christ.

4. If we compare the public life of these two men, the Grecian shines in a scholastic, the Roman in a pastoral capacity. Origen appears as an author, and moves in a sphere calculated for the learned. Cyprian is a preacher, and, like the Apostles, addresses equally all sorts of men. The latter, on account of the pride of corrupt nature, was most likely to be regarded by the poor: He valued not refinement of composition: His aim was to reach the heart and the conscience, and to reduce every religious consideration to real practice. Origen, however, was usefully employed in untying knotty speculations, in refuting heresies, and in recommending Christianity, or something like Christianity, to the learned world. No doubt, his labours would be of some advantage amidst the mischief which the accommodating scheme produced; but

* 1 Cor. iiii. 12.

the pastoral exhortations of Cyprian, as they would not be received at all by prejudiced philosophers, so, where they were received, left effects of unadulterated piety, through the divine influence that attended them. As a Christian bishop, scarcely any age has seen his superior in activity, disinterestedness, and steady attention to discipline. He was equally remote from the extremes of negligent remissness, and impracticable severity: and he possessed a charity and a patience unwearied, and ever consistent. He may safely be recommended as a model to all pastors, and particularly to those of rank and dignity throughout Christendom. Whoever feels a desire to serve God in the most arduous and the most important of all professions, may profitably,—next after the study of the sacred oracles, give days and nights to Cyprian's writings.—All his genuine compositions,—if you except his correspondence and controversy with Stephen of Rome,—deserve a diligent perusal; yet no man must be expected to relish them thoroughly, unless he himself has experienced the new-birth unto righteousness. A truly regenerated person will not only relish them, but also will not fail to be affected with a generous glow of the purest godliness, upon reading them with care and attention.—The frequency of such bishops in Europe is devoutly to be wished! What avail good sense, taste, learning, without Christian simplicity—and a heart above the world, its flatteries or its frowns!—Contemplate—study the character of the prelate of Carthage, and you will learn what Christian bishops once were, and what they still ought to be.

5. But the chief point of view in which the contrast between these two persons is most striking, is in the consequences and fruits of their labours and their writings. Before Cyprian's time, Africa appears to have been in no very flourishing state with respect to Christianity. Within twelve years

he was the instrument of most material service in recovering many apostates, in reforming discipline, and in reviving the essence of godliness. His example was most powerful and effectual among them for ages. The honours paid to his memory demonstrate this: Moreover it is certain, that his liocese, once the scene of Punic greatness, continued, long after, one of the most precious gardens of Christianity, as I shall have abundant occasion to show in the course of this History,—if I should be permitted to continue it.—But the mischiefs of Origen's taste and spirit in religion were inexpressible.—Talents and learning are coveted by mankind; he, however, who possesses much of them, has the more abundant need to learn humility and divine caution. For, if he do not evidently benefit mankind by them, he is in danger of doing much mischief. No man, not altogether unsound and hypocritical, ever injured the Church of Christ more than Origen did. From the fanciful mode of allegory, introduced by him and uncontrolled by Scriptural rule and order, arose a vitiated method of commenting on the sacred pages; which has been succeeded by the contrary extreme—namely, a contempt of types and figures altogether; and, in a similar way, his fanciful ideas of LETTER and SPIRIT tended to remove from men's minds all just conceptions of genuine spirituality.—A thick mist for ages pervaded the Christian world, supported and strengthened by his absurd allegorical manner of interpretation. The learned alone were considered as guides implicitly to be followed; and the vulgar, —when the literal sense was hissed off the stage, —had nothing to do but to follow their authority wherever it might conduct them.—It was not till the days of Luther and Melancthon, that this evil was fairly and successfully opposed.

If I have carried the parallel to a greater length than the just laws of history allow, the importance

of the case is my apology. Let the whole be attentively weighed by the serious reader, in connexion with two passages of St. Paul: the first of which is,—“ I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ;”—and the second—“ Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

CHAP. XVI.

OTHER PARTICULARS OF VALERIAN'S PERSECUTION.

It has been already mentioned, that Cyprian heard of the death of Sixtus, bishop of Rome, a little before his own martyrdom. In pursuance of the cruel orders of Valerian, for carrying on the persecution, that prelate had been seized with some of his clergy. While they were carrying him to execution, Laurentius, his chief deacon, followed him weeping, and said “ Whither goest thou, Father, without thy son?” Sixtus said, “ You shall follow me in three days.” We may suppose him to have been possessed with the spirit of prophecy in saying this, because we are certain that miraculous gifts were as yet by no means extinct in the Church: But perhaps, the declaration was not out of the reach of common sagacity from the circumstances of affairs.

After Sixtus's death*, the Prefect of Rome, moved by an idle report of the immense riches of the Roman Church, sent for Laurentius, and ordered him to deliver them up. Laurentius replied, “ Give me a little time to set every thing in order, and to take an account of each particular.” The Prefect granted him three days time. In that space Laurentius collected all the Poor who were supported by the Roman Church, and going to the

* Aug. Vol. 9. p. 52.—See Fleury, B. 7.

Prefect, said, "Come, behold the riches of our God; you shall see a large court full of golden vessels." The Prefect followed him, but seeing all the poor people, he turned to Laurentius with looks full of anger. "What are you displeased at?" said the martyr;—"The gold, you so eagerly desire, is but a vile metal taken out of the earth, and serves as an incitement to all sorts of crimes: the true gold is that Light whose disciples these poor men are. The misery of their bodies is an advantage to their souls: Sin is the real disease of mankind: The great ones of the earth are the truly poor and contemptible. These are the treasures which I promised you; to which I will add precious stones.—Behold these virgins and widows; they are the Church's crown; make use of these riches for the advantage of Rome, of the emperor, and of yourself."

Doubtless, if the Prefect's mind had been at all disposed to receive an instructive lesson, he would have met with one here. The liberality of Christians in maintaining a great number of objects, and in looking for no recompence but that which shall take place at the resurrection of the just, while they patiently bore affliction, and humbly rested on an unseen Saviour, was perfectly agreeable to the mind of HIM, who bids his disciples, in a well-known parable, to relieve those who cannot recompense them*. How glorious was this scene! at a time when the rest of the world were tearing one another in pieces, and when philosophers made not the slightest attempts to alleviate the miseries of their fellow-creatures!—But, as the persecutors would not hear the doctrines explained, so neither would they see the precepts exemplified with patience. "Do ye mock me?" cries the Prefect; "I know, ye value yourselves for contemning death, and therefore ye shall not die at once." Then he caused Laurentius to be stripped, extended, and fastened to a gridiron, and,

* Luke xiv. 12—15.

in that manner, to be broiled to death by a slow fire. When he had continued a considerable time with one side to the fire, he said to the Prefect, "Let me be turned, I am sufficiently broiled on one side." And when they had turned him, he looked up to heaven and prayed for the conversion of Rome; and then gave up the ghost!

I give this story at some length, because it has sufficient marks of credibility, and is supported by the evidence of Augustine.—I am not disposed to follow Fleury in various other narratives. In subjects of martyrology this author seems directly opposite to our countryman Gibbon. Whatever judgment these historians possessed, remained, in this matter, equally unexercised by both. Indiscriminate incredulity is as blind as indiscriminate belief.—I may not always succeed, but I certainly endeavour to separate truth from fiction, and neither to impose on my readers nor myself.

At Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, a child, named Cyril, showed uncommon fortitude. He called on the name of Jesus Christ continually, nor could threats or blows prevent him from openly avowing Christianity.—Several children of the same age persecuted him; and his own father, with the applauses of many persons for his zeal in the support of paganism, drove him out of his house. The judge ordered him to be brought before him, and said, "My child, I will pardon your faults; and your father shall receive you again: It is in your power to enjoy your father's estate, provided you are wise, and take care of your own interest." "I rejoice to bear your reproaches," replied the child;—God will receive me: I am not sorry that I am expelled out of our house: I shall have a better mansion: I fear not death, because it will introduce me into a better life." Divine Grace having enabled him to witness this good confession, he was ordered to be bound and led, as it were, to execution. The judge had given secret orders to

bring him back again, hoping that the sight of the fire might overcome his resolution. Cyril remained inflexible. The humanity of the judge induced him still to continue his remonstrances. "Your fire and your sword," says the young martyr, "are insignificant. I go to a better house; I go to more excellent riches: Dispatch me presently, that I may enjoy them." The spectators wept through compassion. "Ye should rather rejoice," says he, "in conducting me to punishment. Ye know not what a city I am going to inhabit, nor what is my hope." Thus he went to his death, and was the admiration of the whole city.—Such an example illustrates well that Scripture,—“Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength.”

There were at Antioch a presbyter and a layman, the former named Sapricius, the latter Nicephorus, who through some misunderstanding, after a remarkable intimacy, became so completely estranged, that they would not even salute each other in the street. Nicephorus after a time relented, begged forgiveness of his fault, and took repeated measures to procure reconciliation,—but in vain. He even ran to the house of Sapricius, and throwing himself at his feet, entreated his forgiveness for the Lord's sake;—the presbyter continued obstinate.

In this situation of things the persecution of Valerian reached them suddenly. Sapricius was carried before the governor, and ordered to sacrifice in obedience to the edicts of the emperors. "We Christians," replied Sapricius, "acknowledge for our King Jesus Christ, who is the true God, and the Creator of heaven and earth.—Perish idols, which can do neither good nor harm!" The Prefect tormented him a long time, and then commanded that he should be beheaded. Nicephorus, hearing of this, runs up to him, as he is led to execution, and renews in vain the same supplications. The executioners deride his humility as perfect folly. But he perseveres, and

attends Sapricius to the place of execution. There he says further, It is written, "Ask, and it shall be given you."—But, not even the mention of the word of God itself, so suitable to Sapricius's own circumstances, could affect his obstinate and unforgiving temper.

Sapricius
cants.

Sapricius, however, suddenly forsaken of God, recants, and promises to sacrifice. Nicephorus, amazed, exhorts him to the contrary, but in vain. He, then, says to the executioners, "I believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he hath renounced." The officers return to give an account to the governor, who ordered Nicephorus to be beheaded*.

The account ends here:—but if Sapricius lived to repent, as I hope he did, he might learn what a dangerous thing it is for a miserable mortal, whose sufficiency and perseverance rest entirely on Divine Grace, to despise, condemn, or exult over his brother. The LAST became the FIRST:—and God showed his people wonderfully by this case, that he will support them in their sufferings for his name; but that, at the same time, he would have them to be humble, meek, and forgiving. This is the first instance I have seen of a man attempting to suffer for Christ on PHILOSOPHICAL grounds;—and it failed: Self-sufficiency and pure Christianity are, in their nature, distinct and opposite:—Let no man attempt to unite or mix together such heterogeneous and jarring principles.

It appears that Christian fortitude is a very different thing from the steady pride of a philosopher, or the sullen patience of an Indian; and, that it cannot even subsist in the absence of Christian meekness and charity.—Philosophers and savages without the least supernatural help, have frequently maintained a hardy and unconquerable spirit. But the event of this story may teach the infidel,—that

* Fleury, Book 7. Acta sincera 253, 254.

he has no reason to exult in such instances,—that the spirit of suffering for Christ is, in its kind, a quite different thing,—that it is above mere human nature,—that it is wrought in the heart by divine grace,—and, that it cannot subsist if the Spirit of God be provoked to leave the sufferer.

Dionysius of Alexandria, whom Divine Providence had so remarkably preserved in the Decian persecution, lived to suffer much also in this—but not to death. Eusebius has preserved some extracts of his writings, which not only prove this fact beyond dispute, but also throw considerable light on the effects of Valerian's persecution in Egypt*.

This bishop, with his presbyter Maximus, three deacons, and a Roman Christian, was brought before Æmilian the Prefect, and was ordered to recant: At the same time it was observed, that his doing so might have a good effect on others.—He answered, “We ought to obey God rather than man; I worship God, who alone ought to be worshipped.” “Hear the clemency of the emperor,” says Æmilian: “You are all pardoned, provided you return to a natural duty:—Adore the gods who guard the empire, and forsake those things which are contrary to nature.” Dionysius answered, “All men do not worship the same gods, but men worship variously according to their sentiments. But we worship the ONE GOD, the maker of all things, who gave the empire to the most clement emperors Valerian and Gallienus; and to him we pour out incessant prayers for their prosperous administration.” “What can be the meaning,” says Æmilian, “why ye may not still adore that God of your's,—on supposition that he is a god—in conjunction with our gods?” Dionysius answered,—“We worship no other God.”

From this remarkable question of the Prefect, it is evident, that men might have been tolerated in the worship of Jesus, if they had allowed idolaters

* Book 7. Chap. x.

also to be right in the main, by associating idols with the true God. The firmness of Christians, in this respect, provoked their enemies. The dislike, at this day, of the pure Gospel of Christ, arises from a similar cause: Men are condemned as bigots, because they cannot allow the world at large to be right in the eyes of God.

Æmilian banished them all to a village near the desert, called Cephro. And thither Dionysius, though sickly, was constrained to depart immediately. "And truly," says Dionysius, "we are not absent from the church; for I still gather such as are in the city as if I were present:—absent indeed in body, but present in spirit. And there continued with us, in Cephro, a great congregation, partly of the brethren which followed us from Alexandria, and partly of them which came from Egypt. And there God opened a door to me to speak his word. Yet, at the beginning, we suffered persecution and were stoned: but at length, not a few of the pagans forsook their idols and were converted. For, here, we had an opportunity to preach the word of God to a people who had never heard it before. And God, that brought us among them, removed us to another place, after our ministry was there completed. As soon as I heard that Æmilian had ordered us to depart from Cephro, I undertook my journey cheerfully, though I did not know whither we were to go; but, upon being informed that Colluthio was the place, I felt much distress; because it was reported to be a situation destitute of all the comforts of society, exposed to the tumults of travellers and infested by thieves. My companions well remember the effect this had on my mind. I proclaim my own shame: At first I grieved immoderately. It was a consolation, however, that it was nigh to a city. I was in hopes from the nearness of the city, that we might enjoy the company of dear brethren; and that particular assemblies for divine worship

might be established in the suburbs, which indeed came to pass.

Amidst this scantiness of information conveyed in no great perspicuity or beauty of style, it appears, however, that the Lord was with Dionysius, and caused his sufferings to tend to the furtherance of the Gospel.—His confession of his own heaviness of mind does honour to his ingenuousness: and the strength of Christ was made perfect in his weakness.

In another epistle, he gives a brief account of the afflictions of others.—It deserves to be transcribed as a monument of the greatness and the violence of Valerian's persecution.

“It may seem superfluous to recite the names of our people: for they were many, and to me unknown. Take this however for certain: There were men and women, young men and old men, virgins and old women, soldiers and vulgar persons, of all sorts and ages. Some, after stripes and fire, were crowned victors: some, immediately by the sword, and others, after a short but severe torture, became acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. You all heard how I, and Caius, and Faustus, and Peter, and Paul, when we were led bound by the centurion and his soldiers, were seized by certain men of Mareota, and drawn away by violence. I, and Caius, and Peter, were separated from the other brethren, and were confined in a dreary part of Libya, distant three days journey from Parætonium.”—Afterwards he says, “There hid themselves in the city some good men who visited the brethren secretly: Among these, Maximus, Dioscorus, Demetrius, and Lucius, were ministers. Two others of greater note, Faustinus and Aquila, now wander, I know not where, in Egypt. All the deacons died of diseases, except Faustinus, Eusebius, and Chæremon. God instructed Eusebius and strengthened him, from the beginning, to minister diligently to the confessors in prison,

and to bury the bodies of the holy martyrs:—which, however, he could not do without great danger. The president, to this day, ceases not his cruelty, killing some instantly, and tearing in pieces others by torments, or consuming them by bonds and imprisonments: He forbids any persons to come nigh them; and inquires daily whether his orders be obeyed.—Yet our God still refreshes the afflicted with consolation and with the attendance of the brethren.”

This Eusebius,—here honourably mentioned,—was some time after bishop of Laodicea in Syria; and Maximus the presbyter was successor to Dionysius in Alexandria. Faustus was reserved to the days of Dioclesian—again to suffer—even to blood.

At Cæsarea in Palestine, Priscus, Malcus, and Alexander, were devoured by wild beasts. These persons led an obscure life in the country; but hearing of the multitude of executions, they blamed themselves for their sloth; they came to Cæsarea; went to the judge, and obtained the object of their ambition.—Our divine Master, both by precept and example, condemns such forward zeal;—which, however, in these instances, we trust, was not without a real love of his name.—We have seen abundantly how much like a true disciple of Christ, Cyprian of Carthage conducted himself in these respects.—In this same city, there likewise suffered a woman, who was said to be inclined to the heresy of Marcion; but, probably, there was not much ground for the report.

Valerian
put to death
by Sapor,
A. D.
260.

After three years employed in persecution, Valerian was taken prisoner by Sapor king of Persia, who detained him the rest of his life, and made use of his neck when he mounted his horse; and at length commanded him to be flayed and salted. This event belongs to secular rather than Church-history: But as it is perfectly well attested, and as no one that I know of, except Mr. Gibbon, ever

affected to disbelieve the fact, it cannot but strike the mind of any one who fears God.—Valerian had known and respected the Christians: His persecution must have been a sin against the light; and it is common with Divine Providence to punish such daring offences in a very exemplary manner.

After Valerian's captivity the Church was restored to rest. About the year two hundred and sixty-two, Gallienus, his son and successor, proved a sincere friend to the Christians, though, in other respects, no reputable emperor. By edicts he stopped the persecution; and he had the condescension to give the bishops his letters of licence to return to their pastoral charges. One of these letters, as preserved by Eusebius, runs thus;—"The emperor Cæsar Gallienus, to Dionysius the bishop of Alexandria, and to Pinna and Demetrius, with the rest of the bishops. The benefit of our favour we command to be published through the world: and I have, therefore, ordered every one to withdraw from such places as were devoted to religious uses; so that you may make use of the authority of my edict against any molestation; for I have, some time since, granted you my protection:—wherefore, Cyrenius the governor of the province will observe the rescript which I have sent." He directed also another edict to certain bishops, by which he restored to them the places in which they buried their dead.

Gallienus
befriends
the Chris-
tians,

A. D.
262.

Were it needful at this day to refute the rash calumnies of Tacitus and of others against the Christians, one might appeal to these two edicts of Gallienus. It is impossible that either of them could have taken place, if it had not been undeniable, that the Christians, even to the time beyond the middle of the third century, were men of probity and worthy of the protection of government. As it is impossible to avoid this conclusion, the deepest stain rests on the characters of Trajan, Decius, and Valerian, men highly respected in secular history, for

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treating their subjects of the best characters with savage ferocity.—But God, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, provided for his servants a protector in Gallienus, after an unexampled course of heavy persecution during the three last reigns.—Gallienus himself seems to have been more like a modern than an ancient sovereign;—a man of taste, indolence, and philosophy;—disposed to cherish every thing that looked like knowledge and liberty of thinking;—by no means so kind and generous in his constant practice as his profession might seem to promise;—the slave of his passions, and led away by every sudden feeling that seized his imagination. The Christians appear to have been considered by him as a sect of new philosophers; and, as he judged it improper to persecute philosophers of any sort, they found a complete toleration under a prince, whose conscience seems to have been influenced by no religious attachment whatever.

CHAP. XVII.

FROM THE REIGN OF GALLIENUS TO THE END
OF THE CENTURY.CHAP.
XVII.

THE general history of the Church of Christ, for the remaining forty years of this century, affords no great quantity of materials. After having collected them into this chapter in order, it may be proper to reserve, to a distinct consideration, the lives of some particular persons, and other miscellaneous matters, which belong not to the thread of the narrative.

We now behold a NEW scene:—Christians legally tolerated under a pagan government for forty years!—The example of Gallienus was followed by the successive emperors to the end of the century:—It was violated only in one instance;—the effect of which was presently dissipated by the hand of Pro-

vidence.—This new scene did not prove favourable to the growth of grace and holiness. In no period since the Apostles was there ever so great a general decay as in this ;—not even in particular instances, can we discover, during this interval, much of lively Christianity.

Those, however, are not well informed in the nature of the religion of Jesus, who suppose, that, literally, there was no persecution all this time :—True Christians are never without some share of it ; nor is it in the power of the best and the mildest governments to protect men of godliness from the malice of the world in all cases. We saw an example of this when Commodus was emperor :—Observe another under the government of Gallienus.—At Cæsarea in Palestine, there was a soldier—of bravery,—of noble family,—and of great opulence ; who, upon a vacancy, was called to the office of centurion. His name was Marinus.—But, another soldier came before the tribunal, and urged—that, by the laws, Marinus was incapacitated, because he was a Christian and did not sacrifice to the emperors ;—and that he himself, as next in rank, ought to be preferred.—Achæus the governor asked Marinus what was his religion ?—upon which he confessed himself a Christian. The governor gave him the space of three hours for deliberation.—Immediately Theotecnes, bishop of Cæsarea, called Marinus from the tribunal,—took him by the hand,—led him to the Church,—showed him the sword that hung by his side, and a New Testament which he pulled out of his pocket ;—and he then bid him choose which of the two he liked best.—Marinus stretched out his hand, and took up the Holy Scriptures.—“ Hold fast, then,” said Theotecnes ; “ Cleave to God : and HIM whom you have chosen, you shall enjoy : you shall be strengthened by HIM, and shall depart in peace.”—After the expiration of the three hours, upon the crier’s summons, he appeared at the bar,

manfully confessed the faith of Christ, heard the sentence of condemnation, and was beheaded.

Without more acquaintance with the particular* institutes of Roman law on this subject, it is not easy to reconcile this proceeding with the edict of Gallienus.—Perhaps the act of Achæus was illegal,—or, perhaps some particular MILITARY law might be in force against the martyr. The fact, however, rests on the best authority; and the profession of arms appears to have had still among them, since the days of Cornelius, those who loved Jesus Christ.

The greatest luminary in the Church at this time was Dionysius of Alexandria. His works are lost: A few extracts of them, preserved by Eusebius, have already been given;—and some few more may be here introduced.—He speaks of the Sabellian heresy, which had now made its appearance,—as follows:—

The Sabellian Heresy appears.

“As † many brethren have sent their books and disputations in writing to me, concerning the impious doctrine lately propagated at Pentapolis in Ptolemais, which contains many blasphemies against the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also much infidelity respecting his only-begotten Son, the FIRST BEGOTTEN OF EVERY CREATURE, and THE WORD INCARNATE; and, lastly, much senseless ignorance relative to the Holy Ghost;—some of them I have transcribed, and sent the copies to you.”

This is the first account in existence of the origin of Sabellianism;—a plausible corruption, no doubt,—perhaps the most so of all those which oppose the mystery of the Trinity. But, like all the rest, it fails for want of Scripture-evidence, and shows itself to be only a weak attempt to lower and submit to human reason that, which was never meant to be amenable to its tribunal. The careful distinctions of Dionysius, in recounting the persons of the Trinity,

* Euseb. Book 7, Chap. 14.

† Book 7, Chap. 5.

were very proper in speaking of a heresy which confounds the persons, and leaves them nothing of those distinct characters, on which the nature of the doctrines of the Gospel so much depends.

This bishop also delivers his sentiments in the controversy concerning the re-baptizing of heretics: He is against that practice; and, at the same time, he condemns with great severity the Novatian schism;—because, says he, “it charges the most loving and merciful God with unmercifulness*.” Yet, on the subject of baptism, he confesses himself to have been, for some time at least, staggered in opinion by a remarkable case.—“When the brethren were gathered together, and when there was present one who had been, before my time, an ancient minister of the clergy, a certain person, allowed to be sound in the faith,—upon seeing our form and manner of baptism, and hearing the interrogatories and responses, came to me weeping and wailing, falling prostrate at my feet, and protesting—that the baptism which he had received was heretical,—could not be the true baptism,—and, that it had no agreement with that which was in use among us, but, on the contrary, was full of impiety and blasphemy. He owned, that the distress of his conscience was extreme,—that he durst not presume to lift up his eyes to God, because he had been baptized with profane words and rites. He begged therefore to be re-baptized; with which request I durst not comply; but I told him that frequent communion, many times administered, would suffice. This man had heard thanksgiving sounded in the church, and had sung to it, “Amen;” he had been present at the Lord’s table; had stretched forth his hand to receive the holy food; had actually communicated; and, indeed for a long time, had been partaker of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,—therefore, I durst not re-baptize him, but bade him be of good cheer and of

* Book 7. Chap. 7.

a sure faith, and boldly approach to the communion of saints. — Notwithstanding all this, the man mourns continually ; and his horror keeps him from the Lord's table ; and he scarcely, with much intreaty, can join in the prayers of the Church."

We have no farther account of this matter : but surely there is good reason to believe that the God of Grace would, in due time, relieve such a character.

The detestation of heresy, and the marked distinction of true Christianity were, in some circumstances, carried to an extreme, during this century : discipline, however, was not neglected in the Church ; but, as I have already observed, was carried sometimes to excess,—even to superstition.—Satan's temptations are ever ready to drive to despair truly penitent and contrite spirits. This story, as it respects all the parties concerned, breathes throughout a spirit the very opposite to the licentious boldness of our own times, and marks the peculiar character of the piety of the age of Dionysius ;—which was sincere, but mixed with superstition*.

The celebration of the feast of Easter and of other holy days, forms the subject of another of Dionysius's epistles.

Dionysius, now returned from exile to Alexandria, found it involved in the horrors of a civil war. On the feast of Easter, as if he was still in banishment, he wrote to his people, who were in another part of the city, with which he could have no personal intercourse. In a letter to Hierax, an Egyptian bishop at some distance, he says, "It is not to be wondered at, that it is difficult for me to converse by epistles with those at a distance, when I find myself here precluded from having any intercourse with my most intimate friends and tenderest connexions.—Even with THEM I have no intercourse but by writing, though they are citizens of the same Church ; and I find it very difficult to procure a safe conveyance of

* Euseb. Book 7, Chap. 8.—See Greek.

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any letters which I would send to them. A man may more easily travel from the east to the west than from Alexandria to Alexandria. The middle road of this city is more impassable than that vast wilderness which the Israelites wandered through in two generations."—He goes on to describe the miseries of war and bloodshed, of plagues and diseases, which, at that time, desolated Alexandria ;—and he complains that the people still repented not of their sins.

To the brethren he says, " Now every thing is full of lamentation ;—every one does nothing but mourn and howl through the city, because of the multitude of corpses and the daily deaths.—Many of our brethren, through their great love and brotherly affection, spared not themselves, but clave one to another, and attended upon the sick most diligently ; and, in doing so, they brought the sorrows of others upon themselves ; they caught the infection, and lost their own lives. In this manner the best of our brethren departed this life ;—of whom some were presbyters, and some deacons,—highly revered by the common people." He then goes on to observe with what affectionate care the Christians attended the funerals of their friends, while the pagans, in the same city, through fear of receiving the contagion, deserted and neglected theirs. Undoubtedly he describes here a strong picture of the benevolence of Christians, and of the selfishness of other men.—It belongs to true Christianity to produce such fruits, though, in some respects, they might be carried farther than real Christian prudence would vindicate.—But every lover of Jesus is refreshed to find the certain marks of HIS Spirit and HIS presence among his people.

An Egyptian bishop, named Nepos, taught that the Millennium was to commence AFTER the resurrection ; and described the happiness of saints as much consisting in corporeal enjoyments. Dionysius thought the notion dangerous ;—yet, his candour

inclined him to entertain a good opinion of Nepos on the whole. He commends his faith, his diligence, his skill in the Holy Scriptures ; and particularly, his agreeable psalmody, with which many of the brethren were delighted : But, as he thought his opinions not safe, he opposed them. When he was at Arsenoita, he spent three days with the brethren who had been infected with the notions of Nepos, and explained the subject. He speaks with much commendation of the candour and docility of the people, particularly of Coracion their leader, who owned himself brought over to the sentiments of Dionysius.—The authority of Dionysius seems to have quashed the opinions of Nepos in the bud.—The consequence of an injudicious and unscriptural view of the Millennium, thus rejected and refuted by a bishop of candour, judgment, and authority, was,—that the doctrine itself, for ages, continued both much out of sight and out of repute.—The learned reader need not be told, with how much clearer light it has been revived and confirmed in our days.

Dionysius finding how much use had been made of the Revelation of St. John in supporting the doctrine of the Millennium, gives his thoughts on that sublime and wonderful book : With much modesty he confesses, that though he revered its contents, he did not understand their scope.

The subtilty and the restless spirit of those, who corrupt the doctrine of the Trinity, have ever had this advantage,—that while they, without fear or scruple, can say what they please, its defenders are reduced to the necessity either of leaving the field to them entirely, or of exposing themselves to the specious charge of maintaining some human invention, or even heresy,—contrary to that which they are opposing. This last was the case of Dionysius in his attack on Sabellianism. The scantiness of our ideas, and the extreme difficulty of cloathing, with proper expressions, those very inadequate ones which

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we have on a subject so profound, naturally lay us open to such imputation, from which, however, faithful zeal will never be disposed to shrink on a proper occasion ;—I mean, the faithful zeal of those, who see through the designs of heretics, and who prefer truth, though veiled in unavoidable mystery, to specious error disguised in an affected garb of simplicity.—Sabellius had taken pains to confound the persons of the Father and the Son. Dionysius showed, by an unequivocal testimony, that the Father was not the same as the Son, nor the Son the same as the Father.—Dionysius, bishop of Rome, being informed of these things, assembled a council, in which certain expressions attributed to his namesake of Alexandria were disapproved ; and he wrote to him with the view of furnishing an opportunity for explanation.

The bishop of Alexandria with great clearness, candour, and moderation, explained himself at large in a work which he entitled a Refutation and Apology *. In the small remains of this work, it appears that he held the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father: He describes the Trinity in Unity, and steers equally clear of the rock of Sabellianism, which confounds the persons, and that of Arianism, which divides the substance. His testimony, therefore, may be added to the uniform judgment of the primitive fathers on this subject.

“The Father,” says he, “cannot be separated from the Son, as he is the Father ; for **THAT NAME**, at the same time, establishes the **RELATION**. Neither can the Son be separated from the Father ; for the word Father implies the union : moreover, the Spirit is united with the Father and the Son, because it cannot exist separate either from **HIM** who sends it, or from **HIM** who brings it. Thus we understand the indivisible Unity without any diminution.” This

* Anth. de Sent.—See Fleury, L. iv. Book 7.

IAP. account was satisfactory to the whole Church; and
 VII. was allowed to contain the sense of Christians on the
 doctrine.

I of In the year two hundred and sixty-four the heresy
 of Paul of Samosata began to excite the general
 D. attention of Christians; and, about the same time,
 64. a degeneracy both in principle and practice, hitherto
 very uncommon within the pale of Christianity, at-
 tracted the particular notice of all who wished well
 to the souls of men. Paul was the bishop of An-
 tioch. It gives one no very high idea of the state
 of ecclesiastical discipline in that renowned Church,
 that such a man should ever have been placed at its
 head;—But it is no new thing for even sincere
 Christians to be dazzled with the parts and elo-
 quence of corrupt men. The ideas of this man seem
 to have been perfectly secular. Zenobia of Palmyra,
 who, at that time styled herself Queen of the East,
 and reigned over a large part of the empire which
 had been torn from the indolent hands of Gallienus,
 desired his instructions in Christianity*. It does
 not appear that her motives had any thing in them
 beyond philosophical curiosity. The master and the
 scholar were well suited to each other; and Paul
 taught her his own conceptions of Jesus Christ,—
 namely, that HE was, by nature, a common man like
 others. The irregularities of Paul's life and the he-
 terodoxy of his doctrine could no longer be endured.
 There is, in fact, more necessary connexion between
 principle and practice than the world is ready to
 believe;—for pure practical holiness can only be the
 effect of Christian truth.—The bishops met at
 Antioch, to consider his case: Among these, were,
 particularly, Firmilian of Cæsarea in Cappadocia,
 Gregory †, Thaumaturgus, and Athenodorus, who
 were brethren and bishops in Pontus; and Theotecnes

* Athan. tom. 11. p. 857.—Fleury, Euseb. vii. Chap. 6, &c.

† See his life in the next Chap.

of Cæsarea in Palestine. A number of ministers and deacons besides met together on the occasion. In several sessions the case of Paul was argued. Firmilian seems to have presided.—Paul was induced to recant; and with such appearances of sincerity that Firmilian and the council believed him. The matter slept, therefore, for the present, and Paul continued in his bishopric.

It was in the same year two hundred and sixty-four, the eleventh of Gallienus, that Dionysius of Alexandria died, after having held the See seventeen years. He had been invited to the council; but pleaded in excuse his great age and infirmities: he, however, sent a letter to the council, containing his advice, and addressed the Church of Antioch, without taking any notice of her bishop. This was the last service of this great and good man to the Church of Christ, after having gone through a variety of hardships, and distinguished himself by his steady piety in the cause of religion. His having been a pupil of Origen in his younger years was no great advantage to his theological knowledge: It is to be regretted that our materials concerning him are so defective; but, the few fragments, which remain, afford the strongest marks of unquestionable good sense and moderation, as well as of genuine piety.

Death of
Dionysius
A. D.
264.

Gallienus having reigned about fifteen years, Claudius succeeded; and, after a reign of two years, in which he continued the protector of Christians, Aurelian became emperor. Under him a second council was convened concerning Paul of Samosata. He dissembled egregiously; nevertheless, the intolerable corruption both of his doctrine and of his morals, was proved in a satisfactory manner; inso-much that the servants of Christ felt themselves called upon to show openly, that all regard to the person and precepts of their divine Master was not lost in the Christian world*.—Seventy bishops

* Athan. de Syn. Euseb. 28, &c.

appeared at the synod, among whom Theotecnus of Caesarea in Palestine was still one of the principal. They waited some time for the arrival of Firmilian of Cappadocia, who had been invited, and was on his way, notwithstanding his great age; but he died at Tarsus in the year two hundred and sixty-nine. He had been one of the greatest luminaries of the day, and so had Gregory Thaumaturgus of Pontus, who also died in the interval between the first and second council. The loss of these great men was, no doubt, the more severely felt on this occasion, because it was not in the power of every one, who really believed and loved the truth as it is in Jesus, to confute and expose, in a proper manner, the artifices of Paul.

Whoever has seen the pains taken at this day, by many persons of Paul's persuasion, to cover their ideas under a cloud of ambiguous expressions, and to represent themselves, when attacked, as meaning the same thing with real Christians, while, at other times, they take all possible pains, and in the most open way, to undermine the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, will not be surprised that Paul,—artful, eloquent, and deceitful as he was,—should be able to give a specious colour to his ideas. But, there was in the council a presbyter, named Malchion, who added to the soundness of Christian faith great skill in the art of reasoning: He had been, a long time, governor of the school of humanity at Antioch: and his talents and experience were of great service in this business:—He so pressed the ambiguous, equivocating Paul, that he compelled him to declare himself and to disclose his most secret meanings. There needed no more to condemn him. All the bishops agreed to his deposition and exclusion from the Christian Church. —Malchion's disputation against Paul was preserved in writing to the time of Eusebius.

No fact in Church history is more certain than

the deposition and exclusion of Paul ;—and the inference is, thence, demonstratively clear,—that Socinianism in the year two hundred and sixty-nine, was not suffered to exist within the pale of the Christian Church.—I use that term, because it is now well understood ; and because it fairly expresses the ideas of Paul. In truth ;—no injury was done to the man : He had certainly no more right to Christian preferment than a traitor has to hold an office of trust under a legal government ; and to oblige him to speak out what he really held, was no more than what justice required : Truth and openness are essential to the character of all teachers : He who is void of them, deserves to be without scholars or hearers. At the same time I cannot but further conclude—that the doctrine, usually called Trinitarian, was universal in the Church in those times :—Dionysius, Firmilian, Gregory, Theotecnes, seventy bishops, the whole Christian world, were unanimous on this head ;—and this unanimity may satisfactorily be traced up to the Apostles.

Paul of
Samosata
deposed.

A. D.
269
or
270.

Paul being deposed, and a new bishop being chosen in his room, an epistle was dictated by the council and sent to Dionysius of Rome and to Maximus of Alexandria, and also dispersed through the Roman world, in which they explained their own labours in this matter,—the perverse duplicity of Paul,—and the objections against him.—The chief part of this will deserve to be transcribed—from Eusebius—as the most authentic account of the whole transaction *.

“ To Dionysius and Maximus, and all our fellow bishops, elders, and deacons throughout the world, and to the whole universal Church,—Helenus, Hymenæus, Theophilus, Theotecnes, &c. with all the other bishops who with us inhabit and pre-side over the neighbouring cities and provinces ;—

* Book 7. chap. 29.

together with the presbyters and deacons and holy Churches of God,—to the beloved brethren in the Lord, send greeting :—

“ For the purpose of healing this deadly and poisonous mischief, we have called many bishops from far, as Dionysius of Alexandria, and Firmilian of Cæsarea in Cappadocia,—men blessed in the Lord ; —the former of whom, writing hither to Antioch, vouchsafed not so much as once to salute the author of the heresy ; for he wrote not specifically to him, but to the whole congregation ;—the copy of which we have annexed. Firmilian came twice to Antioch, and condemned this novel doctrine.—He wished to have come the third time, for the same purpose ; but he only reached Tarsus ; and, while we were assembling, sending for him, and expecting his coming, he departed this life.—THIS MAN* was formerly indigent : He derived no property from his parents, nor acquired any either by a trade or a profession ; yet he is grown exceedingly rich by sacrilegious practices and by extortions.—He deceived the brethren and imposed on their easiness : He entangled them in law suits : pretended to assist the injured ; took bribes on all sides, and thus turned godliness into gain.—Vain, and fond of secular dignity, he preferred the name of JUDGE to that of Bishop : He erected for himself a tribunal and lofty throne, after the manner of civil magistrates, and not like a disciple of Christ.—He was accustomed to walk through the streets, with a numerous guard, in great state, receiving letters and dictating answers ; insomuch that great scandal has accrued to the faith through his pride and haughtiness. In church assemblies he used theatrical artifices, to amaze, surprize, and procure applause from weak people :—such as, striking his thigh with his hand, and stamping with his feet.—Then, if there were any, who did not applaud him, nor shake

* Paul of Samosata.

their handkerchiefs, nor make loud acclamations as is usual in the theatre,—nor leap up and down as his partizans do,—but behaved with decent and reverent attention as becomes the house of God, he reprov'd—and even reviled such persons.—He openly inveighed against the deceased expositors of Scripture in the most impudent and scornful terms; and magnified himself exactly in the manner of sophists and impostors. He suppressed the psalms made in honour of Jesus Christ, and called them modern compositions;—and he directed others to be sung in the Church in his own commendation,—which very much shocked the hearers:—He also encouraged similar practices, as far as it was in his power, among the neighbouring bishops.—He refused to acknowledge the Son of God to have come down from heaven; and affirmed positively that he was of the EARTH.—These are not mere assertions, but shall be proved by the public records of the synod.—Moreover, this same man kept women in his house under the pretence of their being poor: His priests and deacons did the same; but he tolerated and concealed this and many other of their crimes, in order that they might remain in a state of dependence; and that, standing in fear on their own account, they might not dare to bring accusations against him for his wicked actions. He also frequently gave them money;—and in that way, he engaged covetous and worldly dispositions very strongly in his interest.—We are persuaded, brethren, that a bishop and all his clergy are bound to give the people an example of all good works; and we are not ignorant, that many, by the dangerous and evil custom of introducing single and unprotected women into their houses, have fallen into sin;—and how many, also, are subject to suspicion and slander on the same account. If, therefore, it should be admitted, that he hath committed no actual crime, yet the very suspicion arising from such a conduct

been proved so shamefully secular ;—and that, on the most authentic evidence ;—a grievous fact !—The mind is however considerably relieved by observing, that there existed at the same time a becoming zeal for truth and holiness.

Dionysius
of Rome
dies,

A. D.
270.

Dionysius of Rome died, also, in the year 270. His successor Felix wrote an epistle to Maximus of Alexandria, in which,—probably on account of Paul's heresy,—he speaks thus :—“ We believe that our Saviour Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary : we believe that he himself is the eternal God and the Word, and not a mere man, whom God took into himself, in such a manner, as that the man should be distinct from him : For the Son of God is perfect God ; and was also made perfect man, by being incarnate of the Virgin *.”

By the favour of Zenobia, Paul for the space of two or three years supported himself in the possession of the mother-church of Antioch, and of the episcopal house, and, of course, of so much of the revenues as depended not on voluntary contributions of the people. A party he, doubtless, had among the people ; but the horror which Socinianism then excited through the Christian world, as well as the flagitiousness of his life, render it impossible that he should have had, in general, the hearts of the Christians of Antioch. Zenobia was conquered by the emperor Aurelian, and then a change took place : The Christians complained ; and Aurelian, considering Rome and Italy as, in all things, a guide to the rest of the world, ordered,—that the controversy should be decided according to the sentiments of the bishops. Of course Paul was fully and effectually expelled ; and we hear no more of him in history.

Aurelian
begins a
Kth Per-
secution,

A. D.
272.

Aurelian, hitherto, had been the friend of Christians : but pagan superstition and its abettors drove him at length into measures of persecution. The Christians were in full expectation of sanguinary

* Conc. Eph.—See Fleury, Book 3. chap. 4.

a reputation for good sense and discernment; than by any exercises of learning, industry, or reflection, if these should lead him to oppose opinions, which happen to be prevalent. But it is, also, to be remembered, that a temporary reputation which neither consists with truth, nor with the deliberate judgment of the writer, is of very little value;—and with this sentiment in view, I venture to affirm, that religious councils ought not to be universally despised and rejected, because some of them have been useless or hurtful.—The council at Jerusalem* was intrinsically of more value than all the wealth and power of the Roman empire: It was by a council, also, that Cyprian was enabled to serve the Church substantially, though in one instance he failed: And, again, the council, which dictated the letter concerning Paul of Samosata, will deserve the thanks of the Church of Christ to the end of the world. Circumstanced as Paul was,—superior in artifice, eloquence, and capacity;—supported in civil power, and uncontrolled in his own diocese, nothing seemed so likely to weaken his influence and encourage the true disciples of Christ as the concurrent testimony of the Christian world assembled against him. And though it may be difficult for the insincere mildness of polite scepticism to relish the blunt tone of the council, there seem to me, in their proceedings, evident marks of the fear of God, of Christian gravity, and of conscientious regard to truth. No doubt, the reports of Paul's actual lewdness must have been very common in Antioch;—but, for want of specific proof,—the hardest thing in the world to be obtained in such cases,—they check the smallest disposition to exaggerate: they assert no more than what they positively knew; and thus they convince posterity that they were, in no way, under the dominion of intemperate passion or resentment. This is the first instance of a Christian bishop having

* See the Acts of the Apostles.

advantages completed the corruption : Ecclesiastical discipline, which had been too strict, was now relaxed exceedingly : bishops and people were in a state of malice : Endless quarrels were fomented among contending parties ; and ambition and covetousness had, in general, gained the ascendancy in the Christian Church. Some there, doubtless, were, who mourned in secret, and strove in vain to stop the abounding torrent of the evil. The truth of this account seems much confirmed by the extreme dearth of real Christian excellencies after the death of Dionysius. For the space of thirty years, no one seems to have arisen like Cyprian, Firmilian, Gregory, or Dionysius :—No bishop or pastor, eminent for piety, zeal, and labour.—Eusebius, indeed, mentions the names and characters of several bishops ; but he extols only their learning and philosophy, or their moral qualities. He speaks with all the ardour of affection concerning a minister in Cæsarea of Palestine, named Pamphilus,—but, in this case also, the best thing he asserts of him is, “ that he suffered much persecution and was martyred at last.”—This event must have happened in the time of the persecution by Dioclesian, which begins just after the limits prescribed to this volume.—Notwithstanding this decline both of zeal and of principle ;—notwithstanding this scarcity of evangelical graces and fruits, still Christian worship was constantly attended ; and the number of nominal converts was increasing ;—but the faith of Christ itself appeared now an ordinary business ; and here TERMINATED, or nearly so, as far as appears, that great first Effusion of the Spirit of God, which began at the day of Pentecost. Human depravity effected throughout a general decay of godliness ; and one generation of men elapsed with very slender proofs of the spiritual presence of Christ with his Church.

The observation of Eusebius, who honestly confesses this declension, is judicious. “ The heavy hand of God’s judgments began softly, by little and

little, to visit us after his wonted manner : The persecution, which was raised against us, took place first among the Christians who were in military service ; but, we were not at all moved with his hand, nor took any pains to return to God : We heaped sin upon sin, judging, like careless Epicureans, that God cared not for our sins, nor would ever visit us on account of them. And our pretended shepherds, laying aside the rule of godliness, practised among themselves contention and division.” —He goes on to observe,—that the “dreadful persecution of Dioclesian was then inflicted on the Church, as a just punishment and as the most proper chastisement for their iniquities.”

Toward the end of the century, while Dioclesian was practising the superstitious rites of divination, he became persuaded that the ill success of his attempts to pry into futurity, were owing to the presence of a Christian servant, who had made, on his forehead, the sign of the cross : and he immediately, in great anger, ordered not only those who were present, but all in his palace, to sacrifice to the gods, or, in case of refusal, to be scourged with whips*. He commanded also the officers of his armies to constrain all the soldiers to do the same, or to discharge the disobedient from the service. Eusebius alludes to this in the foregoing passage.—Christian truth, however, had not so universally decayed, but that many chose rather to resign their commissions, than to do violence to their consciences.—Very few were put to death on this account.—The story of Marcellus is remarkable†. Mr. Gibbon has undertaken to justify his execution, by representing him as punished purely for desertion and military disobedience. But, it is no unusual thing for this historian to suppress or to disguise facts, when the credit

* Lactantius, de morte persecut.

† Acta sincera, Fleury, Book 8. Chap. 27.

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of religion is concerned : and I might have added : this instance to the list of his perversions, which I formerly submitted to the judgment of the public *. The truth is, the death of Marcellus was the effect of a PARTIAL PERSECUTION : New military rules, subversive of Christianity, were introduced : Christian soldiers were ordered to sacrifice to the gods ; and they could not do this without renouncing their religion :—Otherwise, it was, in those times, not uncommon for the followers of Jesus to serve in the armies.

cellus,
ed St.
cellus,
aded.
.. D.
98.

It was in the year two hundred and ninety-eight, at Tangier in Mauritania, while every one was employed in feasting and sacrifices, that Marcellus the centurion took off his belt, threw down his vine-branch and his arms, and added, “ I will not fight any longer under the banner of your emperor, or serve your gods of wood and stone. If the condition of a soldier be such that he is obliged to sacrifice to gods and emperors, I abandon the vine-branch and the belt, and quit the service.” “ We plainly see the cause,” says Fleury, “ that forced the Christians to desert :—They were compelled to partake of idolatrous worship.” The centurion was ordered to be beheaded : And Cassianus, the register, whose business it was to take down the sentence, cried out aloud, that he was shocked at its injustice. Marcellus smiled for joy, foreseeing that Cassianus would be his fellow-martyr : In fact, he was actually martyred about a month after.

When I first read Mr. Gibbon’s account of this transaction, I concluded that Marcellus had suffered on mere principles of modern Quakerism.—Quite unnecessary are any further remarks, on a subject, which is not in the smallest degree obscure or uncertain.

These preliminaries to the persecution, with which the next century opens, did not, it seems, duly

* See Milner’s Gibbon.

affect the minds of Christians in general; nor was the spirit of prayer stirred up among them;—a certain sign of long and obstinate decay in godliness! There must have been, in secret, a lamentable departure from the lively faith of the Gospel. Origenism, and the learning and philosophy connected with it, were extremely fashionable: And we conjecture, that the sermons of Christian pastors had more, in general, of a merely moral and philosophical cast, than of any thing purely evangelical. In truth, justification by faith,—heartly conviction of sin,—and the Spirit's influences, are scarcely mentioned in all this season. Moral duties, I doubt not, were inculcated,—but professors of Christianity continued immoral and scandalous in their lives. The state of the Church of England from the time of Charles II. down to the middle of the last reign,—full of party, faction and animosities, and love of the world, yet in its public ministrations adorned with learning, and abounding in external morality,—seems very much to resemble that of the Christian Church in manners and in piety, from the death of Dionysius to the end of the century.—In one instance there was a great difference: Superstition was much stronger in the ancient Church; but as it was enlisted in the service of self-righteousness, and as the faith of Christ and the love of God was, in a great measure, buried under it, such a diversity does not affect the general likeness.

God, who had exercised long patience, declared at length in the course of his providence, “Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused MY FURY TO REST UPON THEE*.”

But this scene, which introduces quite a new face on the Church, and was quickly followed by several surprising revolutions, belongs to the next century.

* Ezek. xxiv. 13.

CHAP. XVIII.

SOME ACCOUNT OF GREGORY THAUMATURGUS,
THEOGNOSTUS, AND DIONYSIUS OF ROME.CHAP.
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THESE three persons are all, whom I can find belonging to the third century, to whom, according to my plan, sufficient justice has not been done already. Of the two last, indeed, I have little to say. Of the first more is recorded. Eusebius* has given a short account of him; and his life is written, at length, by Gregory of Nyssen. Cave and Fleury have collected the most material things concerning him; but the former is more to be depended on.—I wish to furnish the reader with every information that may appear valuable concerning this great man: I wish to separate truth from fiction. Considerable allowance, no doubt, must be made for the growth of superstitious credulity:—I dare not, however, reject all that part of Gregory's narrative, in which miraculous powers are ascribed to Thaumaturgus.—His very name† admonishes the historian to be cautious in this matter: and though no great stress, perhaps, ought to be laid on such a circumstance alone, it behoves us to remember that the same idea is supported by the concurrent testimony of antiquity.

He was born at Neocæsarea, the metropolis of Cappadocia. His father, zealous for paganism, took care to educate him in idolatry, and in the learning of the Gentile world.—He died when his son was only fourteen years of age.—The mother of Thaumaturgus took care, however, to complete his education and that of his brother Athenodorus, who was afterwards a Christian bishop, as well as himself.—He travelled to Alexandria to learn the Platonic philosophy, where he was equally remarkable for strictness of life and

* Book 6. Chap. 29.

† Wonderworker.

for close attention to his studies. The renowned Origen, at that time, gave lectures in religion and philosophy, at Cæsarea in Palestine. Thaumaturgus, his brother Athenodorus, and Firmilian, a Cappadocian gentleman, with whom he had contracted an intimate friendship, put themselves under his tuition. This same Firmilian is the Cappadocian bishop, whom we have, repeatedly, had occasion to mention. The two brothers continued five years with Origen, and were persuaded by him to study the holy Scriptures; and no doubt is to be made, but that the most assiduous pains were exerted by that zealous teacher to ground them in the belief of Christianity.—On his departure he delivered an eloquent speech in praise of Origen, before a numerous auditory:—a testimony at once of his gratitude and of his powers of rhetoric.

There is still extant a letter written by Origen to Gregory Thaumaturgus*, in which he exhorts him to apply his knowledge to the promotion of Christianity. The best thing in it is, that he advises him to pray fervently and seriously for the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Being now returned to Neocæsarea, he gave himself much to prayer and retirement; and, doubtless, was, in secret, prepared and disciplined for the important work to which he was soon after called. Neocæsarea was a large and populous city,—full of idolatry,—the very seat of Satan; so that Christianity could scarcely gain any entrance into it. Phædimus, bishop of Amasea, a neighbouring city, was grieved to see its profaneness; and hoping much from the piety and capacity of young Gregory, he took pains to engage him there in the work of the ministry. Gregory, from pure modesty, endeavoured to elude his designs; but was at length prevailed on to accept the charge.

The scene was arduous. He had a Church to

* Origen Philocal. C. 13.

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found, before he could govern it. There were not above seventeen professors of Christianity in the place. His name-sake of Nyssen seems to have been imposed on by the superstitious spirit, then too prevalent, when he tells us that Gregory Thaumaturgus received, in a vision, a creed from John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary. But, as he assures us, that the original, written with his own hand, was preserved in the Church of Neocæsarea in his time; and,—as this is a matter of fact of which any person might judge;—as the creed itself contains nothing but what is very agreeable to the language of the fathers of the third century;—and, as we have already seen the exact and steady pains with which they guarded the doctrine of the Trinity against heresies,—I do not hesitate to conclude that he either actually composed the creed in question, or received it as his own;—at the same time the intelligent reader, when he has considered its contents, and the consequences deducible from them, need not be in the least surprised at the industry* with which, in our times, its credit has been impeached. The whole creed is as follows, and merits our attention the more,—because the orthodoxy of Gregory has been unreasonably suspected, against the express testimony of Eusebius,—who, we have seen above,—represents him as one of the opposers of Paul of Samosata, at the first council.

“There is one God,—The Father of the living Word, of the subsisting wisdom and power, and of HIM, who is his eternal express Image: The perfect Father of Him that is perfect: The Father of the only-begotten Son. There is One Lord, the only Son of the only Father; God of God; the Character and Image of the Godhead; the energetic Word; the comprehensive Wisdom by which all things were made; and the Power that gave Being to all creation: The true Son of the true Father: The Invi-

* See Lardner's Credibility.

sible of the Invisible: The Incorruptible of the Incorruptible: The Immortal of the Immortal: The Eternal of the Eternal. There is one Holy Ghost, having his subsistence of God; who was manifested through the Son to men: The perfect Image of the perfect Son: The Life, and the Source of Life: The Holy Fountain: Sanctity, and the Author of Sanctification; by whom is made manifest God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. A perfect Trinity, which, neither in Glory, Eternity, or Dominion, is separated or divided."

Notwithstanding the prejudices, which his idolatrous countrymen must have had against him, he was received by Musonius, a person of consequence in the city; and, in a very little time, his preaching was so successful that he was attended by a numerous congregation. The situation of Gregory, so like that of the primitive Christian preachers, in the midst of idolatry, renders it exceedingly probable that he was, as they were, favoured with miraculous gifts: for THESE the Lord bestowed in abundance, where the name of Jesus had as yet gained no admission; and, it is certain that miracles had not then ceased in the Church.

Gregory Nyssen himself lived within less than a hundred years after Gregory Thaumaturgus; and both he and his brother,—the famous Basil,—speak of his miracles without the least doubt. Their aged grandmother, Macrina, who taught them in their youth, had, in her younger years, been a hearer of Gregory. Basil particularly observes, that she told them the very words which she had heard from him; and assures us that the Gentiles, on account of the miracles which he performed, used to call him a second Moses. The existence of his miraculous powers, with reasonable persons, seems then unquestionable. It is only to be regretted that the few particular instances which have come down to us are not the best

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chosen:—but, that he cured the sick,—healed the diseased,—and expelled devils; and,—that thus God wrought by him for the good of souls, and paved the way for the propagation of the Gospel,—as it is, in itself, very credible, so has it the testimony of men worthy to be believed.

Gregory continued successfully employed at Neocæsarea till the persecution of Decius. Swords and axes, fire, wild beasts, stakes, and engines for distending the limbs, iron chairs made red hot, frames of timber set up straight, in which the bodies of the tortured were racked with nails that tore off the flesh; these, and a variety of other inventions, were used.—But the Decian persecution, in general, was before described.—Pontus and Cappadocia seem to have had their full share. Near relatives, in the most unnatural manner, betrayed one another: the woods were full of vagabonds: the towns were empty: the public prisons were found too small; and the private houses, deprived of their Christian inhabitants, became gaols for the reception of prisoners.

In this terrible situation of things, Gregory considered, that his new converts could scarcely be strong enough to stand their ground and be faithful: He, therefore, advised them to flee; and he encouraged them to that step by his example. Many of his people endured much affliction, but God restored them at length to peace: Their bishop returned again, and refreshed and exhilarated their minds with his pastoral labours.

In the reign of Gallienus, the Christians suffered extremely from the ravages of barbarous nations, which gave occasion to Gregory's Canonical Epistle, still extant,—in which, rules of a wholesome, penitential, and disciplinarian nature are delivered.

The last service which is recorded of him, is the part which he took in the first council concerning Paul of Samosata. He died not long after. A little

before his death he made a strict enquiry, whether there were any persons in the city and neighbourhood still strangers to Christianity: And being told there were about seventeen in all, he sighed; and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, appealed to God, how much it troubled him that ANY of his fellow-townsmen should still remain unacquainted with salvation: At the same time he expressed great thankfulness—that, whereas at first, he had found only seventeen Christians, he should now only leave that same number of idolaters.—Having prayed for the conversion of infidels and for the edification of the faithful, he peaceably gave up his soul to the Almighty.

He was an evangelical man, says Basil, in his whole life: In his devotion he showed the greatest reverence: YEA and NAY—were the usual measures of his communication.—How desirable is it that those who profess to love Jesus, should uniformly practise the same! He never allowed himself to call his brother fool: No anger or bitterness proceeded out of his mouth: Slander and calumny, as directly opposite to Christianity, he peculiarly hated and avoided. Lies and falsehood, envy and pride, he abhorred. He was zealous against all corruptions; and Sabellianism, which long after, in Basil's time, reared up its head, was silenced by the remembrance of what he had taught and left among them.—So Basil tells us.

On the whole, the reader will with me regret, that antiquity has left us such scanty memorials of a man so much honoured of God, so eminently holy, and so little inferior, in utility among mankind, to any, with which the Church of Christ was blessed, from the Apostles days to his own times. For it is not to be conceived, that so great and almost universal a change in the religious profession of the citizens of Neocæsarea could have taken place without a marvellous EFFUSION of the Holy Spirit in that place. And how instructive and edifying would the

narrative be, if we were distinctly informed of its rise and progress! Certainly,—the essentials of the Gospel must have been preached in much clearness and purity. In no particular instance was the Divine influence ever more apparent since the apostolic age.

It is not easy to fix with precision, the time when Theognostus of Alexandria lived; though it is certain that he is later than Origen; and, that he must belong to the third century. He platonizes, after the manner of Origen, in some parts of his writings; yet, he is cited by Athanasius as a witness of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father. "For, as the Sun is not diminished," says he, "though it produces rays continually, so likewise the Father is not diminished in begetting the Son, who is his image." It is certain that this is Trinitarian language; and, though neither Theognostus nor Gregory, nor some others of the ancient fathers, spake always of the Persons of the blessed Trinity, with so much exactness as afterwards was done, it would be an extreme want of candour to rank them with Arians, Sabelians, or the like, when there is the clearest proof that the foundation of their doctrine was really Trinitarian. Before this important article of faith had been contradicted, men did not perceive the necessity of being constantly on their guard respecting it: but when the heresies were formed, they felt themselves, urgently, called upon to express themselves with the most diligent precision. The want of attending to this just distinction has nursed several unreasonable cavils in the minds of those who eagerly catch at every straw to support heretical notions.—Nothing is known of the life of Theognostus.—The proofs of his eloquence and capacity are clear and strong*.

The injustice of the late attempts made to invalidate the evidences of the antiquity and of the unin-

* Du Pin, 3d Century.

interrupted preservation of the doctrine of the Trinity within the three first centuries, requires me to mention one instance more, which, added to the many already mentioned, will, I think, authorize me to draw this conclusion,—that during the first three hundred years after Christ, though the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity was variously opposed, yet the whole Christian Church constantly united in preserving and maintaining it, even from the Apostles days, as the proper sphere, within which all the truth, and holiness, and consolation of genuine Christianity lie; and, one may defy its boldest enemies to produce a single instance of any real progress in Christian piety, made in any place, where this doctrine was excluded.

We have before observed, that Dionysius of Alexandria, through his zeal against the sentiments of Sabellius, became suspected of Arianism; and, that he fully exculpated himself. A Roman synod had been convened on that account; and Dionysius of Rome*, in the name of the Synod, wrote a letter, in which he proves, that the Word was not created, but begotten of the Father from all eternity; and distinctly explains the mystery of the Trinity. Such extreme nicety of caution in steering clear of two rocks like those of Sabellianism and Arianism, between which, it must be confessed, the passage is narrow and straight, demonstrates,—that the true doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, which, with so much clearness, as to the existence of the thing itself, though, necessarily, with perfect obscurity as to the MANNER of the existence, discovers itself every where in the Scriptures, was even then understood with precision, and maintained with firmness throughout the Church of Christ.

* Du Pin, *ibid.*

CHAP. XIX.

THE FURTHER EXTENSION OF THE GOSPEL IN
THIS CENTURY.CHAP.
XIX.

THE power of real Christianity is always the strongest and the clearest in its beginnings or in its revivals.—Exactly contrary to the process in secular arts and sciences, the improvements of following ages, unless they be favoured with fresh effusions of the Holy Spirit, are, in reality, so many depravations of what was excellent in its infancy. For these reasons, the object of this chapter would fall exactly within the design of the author of this History; and it would be a great satisfaction to his mind, to be able to explain, AT LARGE, the extension of the Gospel in the third century.—But we must be content with such materials as we have; and let the reader supply, from his own meditations, as much as he can, whatever he may think defective in the following scanty account.

Extension
of the
Gospel.
A. D.
250.

In the reign of Decius, and in the midst of his persecution, about the year two hundred and fifty, the Gospel, which had hitherto been chiefly confined to the neighbourhood of Lyons and Vienne, was considerably extended in France. Saturninus was the first bishop of Toulouse, and at the same time several other Churches were founded;—as at Tours, Arles, Narbonne, and Paris. The bishops of Toulouse and Paris afterwards suffered for the faith of Christ; but they left Churches, in all probability, very flourishing in piety*. And France, in general, was blessed with the light of salvation.

Germany was also, in the course of this century, favoured with the same blessing, especially those parts of it which are in the neighbourhood of France.

* Book I. Greg. Tours France, C. 30. Fleury 13, B. 6.

Cologne, Treves, and Metz, particularly, were evangelized*.

Of the British Isles little is recorded; and that little is obscure and uncertain: It is rather from the natural course of things and from analogy, than from any positive unexceptionable testimony, that we are induced to conclude that the Divine Light must have penetrated into our country.

During the miserable confusions of this century, some teachers from Asia went to preach the Gospel among the Goths who were settled in Thrace. Their holy lives and miraculous powers were much respected by these barbarians; and, many of them, from a state perfectly savage, were brought into the light and comfort of Christianity †.

The wisdom and goodness of God so ordered events, that the temporal miseries, which afflicted mankind in the reign of Gallienus, were made subservient to the eternal interests of his cruel, blind, and infatuated creatures. The barbarians, who ravaged Asia, carried away with them into captivity several bishops, who healed diseases, expelled evil spirits in the name of Christ, and preached Christianity.—They were heard, in some places, with respect and attention; and became the instruments of the conversion of numbers ‡. That is all that I can collect of the extension of the Gospel among the barbarian ravagers.

CHAP. XX.

A SHORT VIEW OF THE EXTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THIRD CENTURY.

It is the duty of Christians to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a CROOKED AND PERVERSE NATION. That this was actually the case, even in

* See Mosh. 3d Century.

† Sozomen, B. 13. 11.

‡ Ibid. B. 2. C. 5.

the third century,—though much less so than in the two former, and toward the latter end of it with a very rapid diminution of the glorious brightness of the Gospel,—the course of the foregoing narrative has, I trust, made apparent.

Those, with whom the real condition of the rest of mankind in those times, is familiar, will see this in the strongest light. For three centuries, luxury attended by every abominable vice that can be conceived, had been increasing in the Roman empire. There want not lamentable proofs that the severe satires of Juvenal were but too well founded. ALL FLESH HAD CORRUPTED THEIR WAY. With the loss of civil liberty, even the old Roman virtues, of public spirit and magnanimity,—though no better, as Augustine says, than splendid sins in their nature,—had vanished. Civil broils and distractions continually prevailed for the greatest part of this period, and increased the quantity of vice and misery. The best time was, doubtless, during the reigns of Trajan, Adrian, and the Antonines: But, even under those princes, the standard of virtue was extremely low. The most scandalous and unnatural vices were practised without remorse. Men of rank either lived atheistically, or were sunk in the deepest superstition. The vulgar were perfectly ignorant: The rich domineered over the poor, and wallowed in immense opulence; while the provinces groaned under their tyranny: Philosophers, with incessant loquacity, amused their scholars with harangues concerning virtue,—but they neither practised it themselves, nor understood its real nature: By far the largest part of mankind,—namely, the slaves and the poor, were in remediless indigence: No methods whatever were devised for their convenience or relief: In the mean time, the pleasurable amusements of men,—as, the stage and the amphitheatre,—were full of obscenity, savageness, and cruelty.

This was the Roman world. We know much

less of the rest of the globe : which, however, in ferocious wickedness and ignorance, was sunk much deeper than the nations that bowed under the yoke of the Cæsars.

Behold !—In the midst of all this chaos, this corruption, and this ignorance, arose out of Judea a light of doctrine and of practice singularly distinct from any thing that was then in existence !—A number of persons,—chiefly of low life,—the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, live as men ought to do,—with a proper contempt of this vain life,—with the sincerest and most steady ambition for another : They prove themselves to be true philosophers, if real love of wisdom be allowed to consist in the justest views and worship of their Maker, and in actual acquaintance with his character,—in real moderation of their passions and desires,—and in unfeigned benevolence to all mankind, even to their enemies.

No sound rules of philosophizing will direct us to conclude all this to have been of MAN.—The WORK was of God : and this effusion of his Holy Spirit lasted for three centuries,—debased indeed toward the end of that period, but not entirely extinguished.

It was necessary, that this people,—diverse from all others,—the followers of the same Jesus of Nazareth,—should have among themselves some external order,—or, in other words, some ecclesiastical government.—An endless maze of controversy presents itself here ; nor does there appear to be any certain divine rule on this subject. Men may serve God acceptably under very different modes of Church-government ; and, in point of fact, these modes were different in different places during the primitive ages of Christianity. This variety, however, does not appear to have been either so great, or so extreme, as to have excluded all general principles in the regulation of the external Church :

History enables us to discover,—at least the rude outlines of a **USUAL**—of a **PREVAILING PRACTICE**,—which materially differed from most, if not from all the ecclesiastical forms of government, which now exist in the Christian world.

The Apostles, who were the first teachers, and, who planted the first Churches, ordained successors,—as far as appears,—without any consultation of the respective flocks over which they were about to preside. But, as it was neither reasonable nor probable that any set of persons after them should be regarded as their equals, this method of appointing ecclesiastical rulers did not continue;—and, undoubtedly, the election of bishops devolved on the people *. Their appearance to vote on these occasions, their constraining of persons sometimes to accept the office against their will, and the determination of Pope Leo, long after, against forcing a bishop on a people against their consent, demonstrate this. The characters of men to be elected to this office were very strictly examined. Public notice was given, that any one might inform against them, if they were vicious and immoral. The decision on their **MORAL CONDUCT** was left to the people;—that on their **DOCTRINE** belonged chiefly to the bishops who ordained them. For the power of ordination belonged properly to bishops alone, though presbyters—a second order of men, who appear to me all along distinct from them,—concurred with them and with the body of the people. The same power of electing, was, in some degree and in some instances, exercised by the people in the appointment of these very presbyters; but the case is by no means so uniformly clear: and, in filling up the **LOWER** offices of the Church the bishop acted still more according to his discretion.

The use of deacons, the third order in the Church,

* Bingham, Book 4. Chap. 11. Antiquities.—Du Pin. *end of third Century.*

is well known. These three orders obtained very early in the primitive Churches. The epistles of Ignatius,—I build on those parts only that are undoubtedly genuine,—demonstrate this: and, in general, the distinction of these offices was admitted through the Christian world.

Yet, if a Christian people were grown very heretical, the bishops thought themselves bound in duty to provide for the instruction of the smaller number; who, in their judgment, loved the truth as it is in Jesus; and for this peculiar service they were accustomed both to elect and consecrate a bishop. Likewise in sending missionaries to the barbarous nations, it would be absurd to suppose that they waited for the choice of the people. They deputed and ordained whom they approved of for that end.

Besides those, which have been mentioned, there appear, in the third century, a number of lower officers, as door-keepers, sub-deacons, acolyths or attendants, who, by degrees, had grown up in the Christian Church. A much more candid and true account of them may be given, than what has been imposed on us, with sufficient malignity. It could not be to administer to the pride and sloth of the higher clergy, that such offices were instituted. Christians increased in number, and more labourers were required. Besides, as they had not then any seminaries of learning, the serving of the Church in these lower offices was made an introductory step to the higher ones: And this was their most important use*.

The authority of the bishop was by no means unlimited;—but it was very great. Nothing could be done in the Church without his consent. The extent of his diocese was called *Παροικία*. Some of these DIOCESES had a greater, others a less number of Churches which belonged to them. The diocese of Rome, before the end of the third century, had

* Bing. Book 3. Chap. 1.—Calv. Institutes, Book the last.

HAP.
XX.

above forty Churches,—as Optatus observes;—and this agrees very well with the account before stated, namely,—that under Cornelius the bishop, there were forty-six priests*.—Cornelius, according to the usual practice in those times, must himself have ministered—particularly at the chief or mother-church: and the priests of course, must have taken care of the other Churches. But, distinct parishes, with presbyters allotted to them, were not yet known in cities†.—It appears that the bishop sent them successively to minister according to his discretion. The neighbouring villages, however, which were annexed to bishoprics, could not be supplied in that manner: And they had,—even then,—stated parish priests,—who acted under the authority of the bishop.

That bishops were not merely congregational pastors, seems evident from the nature of things, as well as from the concurrent testimony of all antiquity. There were seven bishops who belonged to the seven churches of Asia, called Angels in the Book of the Revelation. It is absurd to suppose that the great Church of Ephesus, in the decline of St. John's life, should be only a single congregation; and, most probably, the same is true of all the rest. Supposing the Christian brethren to consist of only five hundred men; these, with their families and servants, and occasional hearers, would make an assembly large enough for any human voice. But, it is more probable that the number of Christians at Ephesus amounted to many thousands. This was the case at Jerusalem‡: And, in Chrysostom's time, the Church of Antioch consisted of a hundred thousand. Perhaps it might comprise half that number in the latter end of the third century.—Nevertheless, it is still certain, that dioceses were then much smaller than in after times: and the vast extension of them proved

* See Chap. IX. of this Volume—towards the end.

† Bing. Book 9. Chap 8.

‡ Acts, xxi. 20.

very inconvenient to the cause of godliness. Arch-
bishop Cranmer wished to correct this evil in our
national Church, and he wanted neither zeal nor
judgment. But that and many other good things
slept with the English Reformers.

The choice of bishops and, — in part at least —
of presbyters by the people, is a custom which seems
to have grown naturally out of the circumstances of
the Church at that time. The first bishops and pres-
byters were appointed by the Apostles themselves*,
nor could I ever discover the least vestige in Scrip-
ture of their appointment by the people. There was
not sufficient judgment in any of them for this
trust; the world being, at that time, Pagan or Jewish,
or at least, infant in Christianity. Apostolical wis-
dom and authority, under God, supplied the want in
the next succession of bishops. As the judgment of
the people matured, and, especially, as the grace of
God was powerful among them, they were rendered
better qualified to be the electors of their eccle-
siastical governors. Precedents, not Scriptural in-
deed, but of very high antiquity, were set; and the
practice continued during at least the three first cen-
turies. On the other hand I do not find that the
people had any power in deposing a bishop: The
cognizance of the crimes of bishops was left to a
council or synod of neighbouring bishops and pres-
byters; and in that, as well as all material affairs
which concerned the Church in general, the autho-
rity of such councils was held very great, from early
times; nor does it appear that the Christian laity
had any direction in them. — The well-authenticated
case of Paul of Samosata is very instructive here.

In furnishing this rough sketch of primitive eccle-
siastical government, I would be understood, neither
to provoke nor to invite any controversy on this con-
tentious subject. I have given my own sentiments,
— but, at the same time, I confess, that I feel no

* Acts, xiii. 23.

surprise that controversies should have been started in a matter, where something may be said—for episcopacy,—for presbytery,—and for independency. To me it seems an unhappy prejudice, to look on any one of the forms as of **DIVINE RIGHT**, or of Scriptural authority.—Circumstances will make different modes more proper, in one place, and at one time, than at another.—And, whoever rests in this conclusion, will be in no danger of bigotry,—but, on the contrary, will see much reason for moderation and latitudinarian indifference in judging of various methods, which have been proposed or made use of for the **EXTERNAL** regulation of the Church.—Let zeal be employed by all sincere Christians in what is really divine and scriptural;—in what is **INTERNAL**, and truly essential to the immortal interests of mankind.—The arguments for the three forms of Church-government, as supported by experience, may be briefly stated thus:—In no one instance does the independent plan appear to have a solid foundation either in Scripture or antiquity; yet, the interference of the people, and the share of authority exercised by them,—though never on the plan of independent congregations,—gives some plausible colour to **INDEPENDENCY**. The presbyterian system seems to be scriptural and primitive, so far as the institution of the clergy is concerned, but defective for want of a bishop. The episcopal form, no doubt, obtained in all the primitive Churches without exception; but—what effectually checks the pride of those who are fond of the pomp of hierarchy,—it must be confessed, that **ANCIENT** episcopacy had no secular mixtures and appendages: and, further, the pastoral character of bishops, together with the smallness of their dioceses, always adapted to pastoral inspection, made them more similar to the presbyterian hierarchy.—When facts are actually balanced in this way, or nearly so, though violent party or prejudice may lead men to view even historical evidence in opposite lights; nevertheless, men

of cool and sedate judgment will not differ much in their opinions.

The discipline of the primitive Church was very strict; it even degenerated, as has been observed, into excessive severity. A clergyman, once deposed for flagitiousness was never restored to his order. This MIGHT be right.—Another custom, which prevailed at length, cannot be vindicated. A person once ejected for his vices from the Church might be restored* ;—on a relapse, being again ejected, he could never be favoured with Church-communion, —though by no means supposed to be necessarily excluded from the mercy of God in Christ.—Their jealous care against heresies has been abundantly shewn; and their ZEAL against viciousness of practice was equal to this. Suppose it be allowed, that this zeal was carried to too great a length; and, even, that it was mixed with superstition; yet,—in comparison of the licentiousness of our times,—how beautiful does it appear!—and how demonstrative of the power and reality of godliness among them!

Christian assemblies were then frequented with great constancy, and the Eucharist was generally administered whenever they met for public worship. But still greater proofs of their superior regard to God and to every thing that is really good, remain yet to be mentioned.

Their liberality to the indigent was wonderful: there was nothing like it at that time in the world. The Jews were a very selfish, hard-hearted people: the Gentiles lived in luxury and splendor, if they could;—but, care for the poor seems to have made no part of their jurisprudence, nor to have been at all a fashionable virtue. I never could learn that philosophers, though they harangued incessantly concerning virtue, either much recommended, or practised any kindness to the bulk of mankind,—that is, the slaves and the vulgar. Indeed their

precepts are particularly directed to the higher ranks, and they seem to forget, that the lower orders belonged to the human species. An hospital, an almshouse, or any similar provision for the poor, was unknown in the pagan and philosophic world. But when the religion of HIM, who is no respecter of persons, began to gain ground, the barbarous spirit of aristocracy lost its dominion among Christians, though it still prevailed in the manners of the rest of mankind. Christians felt themselves **ALL** sinners, **ALL** in the sight of God, on a level. Thus the Christian master, though bound to preserve the due subordination of ranks, and whatever is wholesome in government, considered his slave as his equal in the sight of God, and as redeemed by the same atoning blood of his Saviour. The pride of birth, station, and quality, was crushed. The obedient disciple of Christ, followed the example of his poor, passionate Lord, and made it his business to relieve the miserable. We have seen above a thousand and fifty widows and impotent persons maintained by the liberality of the Roman Church under Cornelius; we have seen also the active charity of the archdeacon Laurentius, in finding out and assisting miserable objects, punished with a fiery death. The very spirit and taste of Christians, with the frugality and simplicity of their lives and manners, enabled them abundantly to help the necessitous; while the rest of the world persecuted them, and while philosophers themselves, dependent on the great, and despising the poor, vainly babbled against them, **“O God of all grace, whose tender mercies are over all thy works,—THIS must be thy religion, which humbled and sweetened the hearts of men, which taught them practically to regard all men as brethren, and to delight in doing good to all, without distinction of persons!”** The pagans themselves admired this brotherly love. **“But the most singularly striking characteristic of**

this people has not yet been noticed.—Though they had a regular polity, guarded by great strictness of discipline, distinguished into a number of communities, each administered by a bishop, presbyters, and deacons; and concentrated by general councils held from time to time; they neither had, nor strove to obtain the least secular support of any kind. They lay exposed to the rage of the whole world around them, incited by its natural enmity against God and by the love of sin; and exasperated on finding itself condemned by these upstarts as deservedly obnoxious to the Divine displeasure. The whole Roman world comprehended thousands of discordant sects and parties,—which all tolerated one another, because all agreed to treat sin with lenity, and to allow one another's religion to be right. It was impossible for Christians to do this: Hence the spirit of persecution was excited; and, whoever at this day lives in the same sincere hostility against all sin, and in the exercise of the same charity, patience, and heavenly-mindedness as they did, will undesignedly, yet assuredly, excite, in a similar manner, the displeasure of the rest of mankind.—Now, it is very easy to understand, how precarious, on this account, their situation in society must have been!—They had not the least legal or secular aid against persecution. Obligated, like the rest of the subjects of the Roman empire, to contribute to the general defence, and to serve in the Roman armies, when called on, they had no civil privileges:—If an emperor chose to persecute them, they were perfectly defenceless; they had no political resource against oppression.

What could be the reason of this? Shall we say their circumstances, during the first three hundred years, were too low, and their means too weak, to encourage them to attempt resistance or innovation of any kind?—This has been said—inconsiderately it should seem,—by those who are not willing to allow

that their passiveness under injuries proceeded from principle. Let us suppose, therefore, for a moment, that they had thought it right to resist THE POWER THAT BE, and that those who resist DO NOT RECEIVE TO THEMSELVES DAMNATION, but merit the tribute of applause for supporting the natural rights of man; then, as no people on earth were ever more unjustly treated, they would naturally feel their injuries as other men do; and admitting them to have been too weak and inconsiderable, in the first century, to have resisted with effect;—surely, in the second, and much more in the third, their thousands and tens of thousands must have been capable of shaking the very foundations of the empire.—So far from being without means, they seem to have had much greater than many who have disturbed the repose of kingdoms.

Here is, “IMPERIUM IN IMPERIO,”—a regular well-united phalanx of men, inured to frugal habits and to a variety of hardships; not a mere mob of levellers, but men taught to obey their religious governors, and submitting to great strictness of discipline. Among their governors, if history had not informed us so, we are sure there must have been some men of genius, fortitude, and capacity, who already had exercised their talents in the art of government, and who possessed that eloquence which can inflame the passions, especially of the lower sort. Cyprian of Carthage is undoubtedly one of these. The same courage, capacity, discretion and activity, which made him an oracle over half the Roman empire among the Christians, would,—if it had been exerted in a military line,—have been formidable to the throne of the Cæsars. Their brethren in the Roman armies could have taught them military discipline: The riches, which a number of them possessed, might have purchased arms and military stores: Those captive bishops, who gained so strong an ascendant over the

ignorant and barbarous nations, might have easily effected alliances between them and others of the Christian name.

Let the reader mark the inference to be drawn from these considerations.—We pretend not to say, who would have prevailed in the end of such a contest, because nothing is more uncertain than the issue of arms : but supposing the Christians to have thought resistance lawful, we maintain that, amidst the distractions of the Roman empire from within and from without, they had both temptations and probabilities sufficiently strong to have induced them to excite seditions and rebellions against their persecutors and oppressors.—In knowledge and civilization they were not inferior to those among whom they lived : It cannot be denied that they were very unjustly treated, and that they possessed the probable means of redressing themselves by force : and further,—we are now arguing on the supposition that they thought it lawful to use those means,—I affirm then, that which ever way we turn, we must be presented with the same conclusion,—namely, that, under such circumstances, resistance would infallibly have taken place ;—whereas, on the contrary, it appears—not from a few scattered passages, but from the whole tenour of the writings of the Christians—and, what is still more, from their uniform practice, without any exception, that they thought it UNCHRISTIAN to seek this mode of relief. Patience, and prayer, and charity, were their only arms : Nor is it possible to find a single instance of a Christian intermeddling with the politics of his time.

Must we not then conclude—That they understood the rules laid down in the thirteenth chapter to the Romans, and other parts of the New Testament of like import, in their plain and literal sense?—That they thought it wrong to revenge injuries, public as well as private, and referred themselves

MAP.
 XN.
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wholly to him who hath said, "Meekness is mine;"
 —I believe we have no other alternative. This was
 the sum of Christian politics; and in this way of
 understanding the Gospel rules of submission and of
 suffering, — it is not hard to conceive, what an ad-
 vantage such a spirit of patience and of abstraction
 from secular politics proved to them, in making
 them feel themselves strangers and pilgrims on earth;
 in causing them to long for the heavenly state, in
 deadening their affections to the world, and in exer-
 cising them in faith and charity! And, whenever
 real Christians, in our times, shall more fully eman-
 cipate themselves from the ambitious notions, with
 which the present habits and prejudices of men
 infect them, and through Divine Grace, shall catch
 this same spirit of the primitive Believers, they will
 then see a beauty in the New Testament principles
 on this subject, of which they have now little idea. —
 The love of the world will then cease to entangle
 them so strongly; and primitive apostolic faith and
 practice will again visit the earth in its genuine
 simplicity.

Anthony
 the Eyp-
 n.
 A. D.
 270.

The monastic spirit, I have already observed, had
 begun to appear during the Decian persecution:
 About the year two hundred and seventy lived
 Anthony the Egyptian, the first founder of these
 communities. Athanasius has written his life; and,
 I doubt not, but many moderns may judge the em-
 ployment to be a proof of weakness of mind. Pos-
 terity will, probably, requite them by being equally
 rash and uncandid in, passing a similar censure on
 present characters. — In truth, Athanasius was a
 man of solid sense and great capacity; but these en-
 dowments are not always a defence against fash-
 ionable errors; and unhappily, the Monkish super-
 stition was, in his time, growing up into high admi-
 ration. — It is much to be wished, that men adverted
 more closely to the "sins which easily beset them-
 selves" in their own days; for then, they would be

less quick-sighted in discovering the absurdities of former ages, and also less disposed to form ostentations and pharisaical comparisons between what they term modern excellencies and ancient defects. — Anthony, it seems, perverting a few texts of Scripture, took upon himself to live in solitude. His austerities were excessive, and the most ridiculous stories are told of his contests with the devil. They merit not the least attention. I observe in them, however, a dangerous spirit of self-righteous pride and vain-glory, by which this same Anthony was encouraged in his progress, and which will lead a man very far in external shows of holiness, while there is little of the reality. It is probable that his life, as it is recorded by Athanasius, might, as superstition grew more and more reputable, appear admirable in the eyes of many persons, who were much better men than this celebrated monk himself.

We shall, for the present, leave Anthony propagating the monastic disposition, and extending its influence not only into the next century, but for many ages after, and conclude this view of the state of the third century, with expressing our regret — “that the faith and love of the Gospel received, toward the close of it, a dreadful blow from the encouragement of this unchristian practice.”

CHAP. XXI.

TESTIMONIES TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST FROM ITS ENEMIES.

THE fastidious indifference, at least, if not the virulent enmity, shown to the Gospel by the great men of Greece and Rome, during the three first centuries, leaves one little reason to expect much account of Christians through the channel of their writings. Nor is the case materially different in our

own days.—A few cursory, sarcastic, and ill-informed reflections are all that, in writers of polite estimation, can be found, concerning more modern revivals and propagation of evangelical truth and godliness. Something, however, which may throw light on the state of religion in the second and third centuries, is to be gleaned from the hostile contemporary writers, and, perhaps, Celsus will be more to our purpose than all the other authors together; particularly, if we attend to the extracts from his writings preserved by Origen.—My views in presenting the reader with the following few quotations from heathen authors, is, not merely to establish the general credibility of the Gospel, but rather, to illustrate the character of real Christians, and to point out some of the effects of the work of the Holy Spirit upon their minds.

In the former part of the second century flourished the Stoic Philosopher Epictetus*.—Arrian has published his discourses. In one passage, he occasionally speaks of “the Galilæans, as indifferent to sufferings,—from madness or from habit.”

These Galilæans are obviously Christians.—Through the operation of what cause they were indifferent to sufferings, we shall be willing to learn from those who better understand the subject. Indeed they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, because they were convinced that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Christian faith and hope afford motives truly deserving a better name than madness or habit. But the fact is attested by this prejudiced philosopher,—namely, that Christians were then exposed to singular sufferings, and that they bore them with a composure and serenity so astonishing, that philosophers knew not how to account for their patience.—They did not

* When Domitian banished the Philosophers from Rome, about the year 94, Epictetus retired to Nicopolis, and died there about the year 161.

understand, that they were strengthened with might, by the glorious power of their God, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.

In the same century, Apuleius, a ludicrous author, in his *Metamorphosis* speaks of a baker, a good sort of man, troubled with a bad wife,—who was possessed of every vice;—perverse, a drunkard, lewd,—a follower of vain observances,—and a woman, who pretended that the Deity was ONLY ONE.

I conjecture that Apuleius would have taken no notice of her other crimes, if she had not been guilty of this last. Mark the revolution in sentiment, which Christianity has made in the world. Throughout Europe the character of any man's understanding would, at present, be much impeached, who should seriously assert a plurality of Gods.—In the second century, the belief of the Divine Unity is, by a polite author classed with an assemblage of vices.—What have ye been doing, philosophers, that ye never could rid mankind of that polytheism, which every philosopher now despises?—Open the eyes of your understandings, and learn that God has effected this mighty change by the Gospel.—This woman was, doubtless, a Christian by profession; but we cannot now tell, whether she merited the reproaches with which her memory is loaded; nor can we say, in what sense her husband, who was plainly a pagan, deserved the appellation of a good sort of man;—but we know that the world, without much scruple, denominates its followers to be good sort of men;—and we also know who said,—“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own.”

The extracts from Celsus,—who wrote in the latter end of the second century,—preserved in Origen's work against him, are very valuable in the light which I have stated. I shall select a few passages, partly from the collections of others, and partly from such as I have noticed myself.—The

reader must be prepared to hear bitter things. A more spiteful calumniator hardly ever existed ; but he may serve a purpose which he never intended. When the following extracts have been seriously considered, the just inferences to be drawn from them, concerning the nature of the Gospel, and the characters of its professors, cannot fail to present themselves to the mind of every candid inquirer after truth.

“ When they say,—Do not EXAMINE, and the like, in their usual manner, surely, it is incumbent on them to teach what those things are which they assert, and whence they are derived.”

“ They say,—Wisdom in life is a bad thing, but folly is good.”

“ Christ was privately educated, and served for hire in Egypt* : he got acquainted with miraculous arts there ; he returned ; and, relying on his power of working miracles, declared himself God.”

“ The Apostles were infamous men, publicans, and abandoned mariners.”

“ Why should you, when an infant, be carried into Egypt, lest you should be murdered ? God should not fear being put to death.”

“ Ye say that God was sent to sinners ; but why not to those who were free from sin ; What harm is it not to have sinned ?”

“ Ye encourage sinners, because ye are not able to persuade any really good men ; therefore ye open the doors to the most wicked and abandoned.”

“ Some of them say, do not EXAMINE, but BELIEVE, and thy FAITH shall save thee.”

With a sneer he makes the Christians say,—
“ These are our institutions : Let not any man of learning come here, nor any wise man, nor any man of prudence ; for these things are reckoned evil by us. But whoever is unlearned, ignorant, and silly,

* The authenticity of St. Matt. 2d chap. which has been unreasonably denied, is supported by this passage.

let him come without fear."—"Thus, they own that they can gain only the foolish, the vulgar, the stupid slaves, women, and children.—They, who conversed with him when alive, and heard his voice, and followed him as their master, when they saw him under punishment and dying, were so far from dying with him or for him; or, from being induced to despise sufferings, that they denied that they were his disciples:—but now YE die with him."

"He had no reason to fear any mortal now, after he had died, and, as ye say, was a God;—therefore, he should have shown himself to all; and particularly, to him that condemned him."

"He persuaded only twelve abandoned sailors and publicans, and did not persuade even all these."

"At first, when they were but few, they agreed: But when they became a multitude they were rent again and again; and each will have their own factions; for they had factious spirits from the beginning."

"They are now so split into different sects, that they have only the name left them in common."

"All wise men are excluded from the doctrine of their faith: They call to it only fools and men of a servile spirit."

He frequently upbraids Christians for reckoning him, who had a mortal body, to be God; and looking on themselves as pious on that account.

"The preachers of their Divine Word only attempt to persuade fools,—mean and senseless persons,—slaves,—women and children.—What harm can there be in learning, or,—in appearing a man of knowledge?—What obstacle can this be to the knowledge of God?"

"We see these itinerants showing readily their tricks to the vulgar, but not approaching the assemblies of wise men; not daring to show themselves THERE, but where they see boys,—a crowd of slaves,—and ignorant men,—there they thrust in themselves and puff off their doctrine."

“ You may see weavers, tailors, and ~~fullers~~, illiterate and rustic men, in their houses,—but not daring to utter a word before persons of age, experience, and respectability: it is, when they get hold of boys, and of silly women, privately, that they recount their wonderful stories; it is then that they teach their young disciples that they must not mind their fathers or their tutors, but obey THEM: Their fathers and guardians, they tell them, are quite ignorant and in the dark, but themselves alone have the true wisdom. And if the children take this advice, they pronounce them happy; and direct them to leave their fathers and tutors, and to go, with the women and their play-fellows, into the chambers of the females, or into a tailor’s or fuller’s shop, that they may learn perfection.”

“ In other mysteries, the cryer used to say, Whoever has clean hands, and a good conscience, and a good life, let him come in. But let us hear whom THEY call. ‘Whoever is a sinner, a fool, an infant, a lost wretch,—the kingdom of God will receive him.’—An UNJUST man, if he humble himself for his crimes, God will receive him; but a JUST man, who has proceeded in a course of virtue from the beginning, if HE look up to him, he will not be received.”

He compares a Christian teacher to a quack, who promises to heal the sick, on condition that they keep from intelligent practitioners, lest his ignorance be detected.

“ Ye will hear them,—though differing so widely from one another, and abusing one another so foully,—making that boast.—The world is crucified to me, and I to the world*.”

“ The same things are better said by the Greeks, and without the imperious denunciation of God, or the Son of God.”

“ If one sort introduce one doctrine, another

* Gal. vi.

another; and all join in saying, 'Believe, if ye would be saved, or depart;' what are they to do, who desire really to be saved? Are they to determine by the throw of a die? Where are they to turn themselves, or whom to believe?"

"Do ye not see, that any man that will, may carry you away and crucify you and your demon:—The Son of God gives you no help."

But enough of Celsus.—He would not deserve a moment's attention, if it were not for the light which he throws on the history of the Christians of his own times,—that is,—of the second century.

It appears evident that there was then a singular sort of persons, subject to all manner of ill treatment from the rest of the world; and who might be hunted down at pleasure by violence or by calumny.—Celsus insults them on account of their defenceless condition. If they had resisted evil with evil, his malignity would have induced him to reproach them on account of their turbulence and seditiousness. Undoubtedly then, they were a meek, quiet, peaceable, inoffensive people. It appears also,—that they worshipped a person, named Jesus, who had been crucified at Jerusalem, and,—that they worshipped him as God; and Celsus derides their folly in so doing: In his view of things, that the same person should be both God and man, was the greatest inconsistency. Their doctrine concerning Christ appears to him foolish beyond measure: fit only for the understanding of fools, and beneath the regard of wise men. Even from his loose and sarcastic views of it one may conclude, that they laid great stress on FAITH:—and that the exercise of it was considered as connected with salvation; but that this exercise, in its whole nature, was contrary to all that is esteemed wise and great in the world. It was also a great stumbling-block to Celsus,—that ~~men~~ the most wicked and abandoned might be saved by faith in Jesus, and,—that men's confidence in

moral virtues was a bar to their salvation. Nor does it appear that the number of converts among the learned or the great was considerable :—The lower ranks of men were best disposed to receive it ; and the bulk of Christian professors consisted of these.

From these premises, with a careful study of the sacred volume, any man, possessed of a humble spirit, may see WHAT THE RELIGION WAS, which Celsus so vehemently reprobates. It could not be the doctrine of common morality. He owns, indeed, they taught this, though he says that the philosophers taught it better. One may appeal to any person almost at this day, whether Christian morals be not immensely superior to any thing that is to be learnt from Plato, Tully, or Seneca. It has been the fashion to extol the moral part of Scripture,—I fear, with an insidious eye to the DOCTRINAL. What this last was in Celsus's days, he himself, in a measure, tells us :—Namely, “ Christ crucified, the living and true God, the only Saviour of sinful men ;—the necessity of renouncing our own wisdom and righteousness ;—salvation through faith alone ;—dependence on our supposed goodness, ruinous and fatal.”—It is certain, that mere moral truths, if they had formed the main part of the Christian scheme, would not so much have provoked the enmity of Celsus.

In other words,—the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, man's fallen state, justification by Jesus Christ alone, divine illumination and influence, these which excite the ill-will of man in his natural state, now as much as they did then ;—THESE were plainly the doctrines which occasioned such misrepresentation and abuse as that, which we have seen.

If the serious reader would take the trouble to examine a variety of controversial writings published against the revival of godliness in our own times, he could not fail to be struck with a remarkable conformity of taste and sentiment between Celsus and

many who call themselves Christian pastors. Circumstances vary: The DRESSES of religious profession alter according to the course of things in this world; and hence, the undiscerning will be liable to form a wrong estimate. But, in reality, there is no "NEW thing" under the sun."—That which, in our times, has been derided as ENTHUSIASM, was treated in the manner we have just described, by Celsus and others, in the third century; and he, who pleases, may now see in England the same sort of persons, living by the faith of the SON of GOD, and held in contempt by persons of the same stamp as Celsus.—It has frequently been well observed, that this adversary of Jesus Christ gives a good testimony to the miracles and facts of the Gospel;—and I add, with much satisfaction, that he is also an excellent witness to the work of the Spirit of God in his day, by showing us what sort of doctrine was preached and professed by Christians at that time.

Lucian of Samosata was a contemporary of Celsus. He has already been mentioned, as throwing considerable light on the history of Christians, in the story of Peregrinus. The delusion into which this hypocritical professor was suffered to fall, after his apostacy, deserves to be noticed as a warning to those, who use the name of Jesus for a cloak to sinister pursuits.

Lucian died at the age of 90.

A. D.

180.

ciriter.

He publicly burnt himself in the sight of all Greece, soon after the Olympic games were over*. He did it to gain himself a name, and "he had his reward."—Heathen authors speak honourably of him. The lustre of his philosophic life, and his ostentatious suicide, expiated, in the eyes of men of this world, the guilt and infamy of his juvenile profession of the Gospel.—A statue was erected to him at Parium in Mysia, which was supposed to be oracular.

That which in a Christian view is the depth of his apostacy, is covered in silence by the heathen writers. Lardner's Collect. chap. xix.

iniquity, may seem, to misguided and vain philosophers, the perfection of virtue. "THE LORD SEETH NOT AS MAN SEETH."

Lucian tells us also of a person, named Alexander, who deluded mankind by oracular falsehoods. Some Epicureans detected and exposed his fallacies, which made him declare that Pontus was full of Atheists and CHRISTIANS, who had the assurance to raise slanderous stories against him: And he excited the people to drive them away with stones. He instituted mysterious rites, like those of Athens; and, on the first day of the solemnity, proclamation was made,—as at Athens—to the following effect: "If any Epicurean, CHRISTIAN, or Atheist, be come hither as a spy upon these mysteries, let him depart with all speed; but I promise a happy initiation to those, who believe in God." Then they thrust the people away,—he going before and saying, "Away with the Christians!" then the multitude cried out again, "Away with the Epicureans!"

We see here again that there is nothing "NEW under the sun." A fervent or artful supporter of old Pagan superstitions finds himself opposed by two sorts of people, the most opposite to one another which can possibly exist,—Epicurean sceptics or men of no religious principle,—and Christian believers. So at this day,—Christians and Sceptics will unite in discountenancing Papal superstitions;—but with how different a spirit!—The one with compassion and gravity,—the other with carelessness and levity:—and, with how different a design!—The former to establish the true worship of God,—the latter to spread universal infidelity.

The Greek author, Lucian, was himself an Epicurean,—abounding in wit and profaneness. His Dialogues are full of sarcastic insinuations against the fashionable idolatry.—He was not aware, that he was co-operating with Christians in subverting the abominations, which had subsisted for so many

ages. His writings were, doubtless, of use in this respect: And, who can foresee how serviceable, under God, the present fashionable spirit of depreciating and lowering Popery may be to the future general establishment of Christianity,—though nothing be farther from the thoughts or wishes of our present political sceptics and infidels?

There is a dialogue, called *Philopatris*, ascribed to Lucian, but probably written by some other person somewhat later. No doubt, it is of high antiquity. It ridicules the doctrine of the Trinity. "ONE THREE, THREE ONE. The most high God; Son of the Father; the Spirit proceeding from the Father." Such are the expressions in the dialogue. The author speaks also of "a beggarly, sorrowful company of people." He insinuates their disaffection to government;—that they wished for bad news, and delighted in public calamities;—and that some of them fasted ten whole days without eating, and spent whole nights in singing hymns.—Who does not see in all this the misrepresentation of an enemy, describing men of holy lives and mortified affections, who worshipped the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and who, in their desires and temper, were elevated above the world?

Aristides the Sophist, another contemporary of Celsus, speaks with indignation against certain persons of his day, whom, he observes, in manners to be not unlike the impious people in Palestine; for they acknowledged not the gods: they differ from the Greeks and all good men, are dexterous in subverting houses and disturbing families: they contribute nothing to public festivals, but dwell in corners, and are wonderfully "wise in their own conceits*."

Thus, when men were out of humour with any persons, they compared them to Christians, who, in this way, were made the "off-scouring of all things." By such evidences as these, however, their sin-

gular abstinence from all reigning vices and follies, their steady adherence to the worship of the living God, and the strength of the divine operations on their minds, are proved beyond contradiction.

Much about the same time, Galen, the famous physician, gave testimony to the firmness and perseverance of Christians: "It is easier," says he, "to convince the disciples of Moses and Christ than physicians and philosophers who are addicted to particular sects." Thus it appears, that their fortitude or their obstinacy was at that time PROVERBIAL, and, moreover, that they were a people then well known in the world.

Plotinus was, in this century, one of the most celebrated disciples of the new Platonic school, the genius of which, as formed by Ammonius, has been before described. He had studied under Ammonius himself; and, by the strength of his parts, the multiplicity of his literary acquisitions, and the gravity of his manners, he attained a very high reputation in the world. He imitated Socrates in his pretensions to a communion with a demon; and was, by his disciples, looked on as something celestial. Persons of the greatest quality revered him. The emperor Gallienus was, once, on the point of giving him a ruined city in Campania, in which he might settle a Platonic republic.—The man seems, to his dying day, to have supported his philosophical reveries.—When he was actually dying, he said, "I am endeavouring to rejoin that, which is divine in us, to that divine part of the universe*." Undoubtedly he alluded to the notion of "God being the soul of the universe,"—that Pantheistic compound of pride and atheistic absurdity, which was the propensity of most of the ancient Philosophers, and was even more impious than all the fables of vulgar Paganism.

* Fleury, &c.

† See this point ably discussed in Warburton's *Legation of Moses*, Book III. Sect. 4. [Vol. iii. 8vo. edit. 1814.]

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The oracle of Apollo, we are told, after his death, informed his admirers that his soul was in the Elysian fields with Plato and Pythagoras.—Such were the artifices by which Satan and his human followers endeavoured to raise up rivals to the Christians. In a work professedly illustrating the operations of the Spirit of God, it seemed proper to take notice of the contrasts, or rather of the counterfeits by which the spirit of falsehood endeavoured to support the declining cause of idolatry.—Its vulgar and gross scenes were, in part, abandoned, and a more refined habit was given to it by philosophy, which pretended to wisdom and virtue in a high degree. But human philosophy could not produce holiness, because humility and the faith of Jesus were not there: Pride was its predominant feature; and while thousands found, even in this life, the salutary benefits of Christianity, vain philosophers prated concerning virtue, but effected nothing either for the honour of God, or the good of mankind.

One of the most studious and laborious disciples of Plotinus was Amelius. It is evident, from a * passage of Eusebius, that he made attempts to unite something of Christianity with Platonism, just as we have seen Origen;—who was of the same school,—mix something of the latter with the former, to the great prejudice of the Gospel. “This was the Word,” says he, “by whom, he being himself eternal, all things that exist were made;—the same whom the barbarian affirms to be with God, and to be God: the Word by whom all things were made, and in whom every thing that was made has its life and being; who, descending into body and putting on flesh, took the form of man; though he even then gave proof of the majesty of his nature; nay, and after his dissolution he was deified again, and is God, the same he was before he descended into body, and flesh, and man.”

Plotinus
died at the
age of 66.

A. D.
270.

* Euseb. Pr. Ev. See Lardner's Collections, chap. xxxiii.

AMAP.
XVI.

This may be called no mean testimony to the Gospel of St. John,—for he is, doubtless, the barbarian here mentioned :—The ideas of Christianity, it seems, in some loose ambiguous manner, were admitted by these philosophers, and incorporated into their system ; and so, in modern times, Swedenburgh, Rousseau, or Bolingbroke, have not been unwilling to ennoble their compositions with sublime sentiments taken from the sacred writings, but confusedly understood ; while yet, they stood aloof from the society of Christians, affected to think them little better than barbarians, and made not, in their own case, the least approach to the faith and love of Jesus.

Thus also Longinus, a scholar of the same school, and well acquainted with Plotinus, in his treatise on the Sublime, produces a fine quotation from the first chapter of Genesis, and calls Moses a man of no mean genius*. Likewise, a fragment of this same writer, which has been preserved ;—and of which I see no reason to doubt the authenticity,—speaks of Paul of Tarsus, as one of the greatest of orators ; and also, as the first supporter of a doctrine by no means proved to be true.

This passage is exactly in the style of Longinus,—rather nervous than elegant. It is found in a manuscript of the Gospels of very good authority ;—and no sufficient reason has been given for suspecting its genuineness.—The internal evidence is all against such a suspicion. The supposed author was a most judicious critic,—if ever there was a person in the world, who deserved that character ;—and therefore, he was very capable, by the excellency of his taste, of seeing and relishing the BEAUTIES of St. Paul's compositions : He possessed a very candid temper,—which would dispose him to acknowledge them ; and he was perfectly indifferent in regard to religion ;—which accounts for his overlooking what ought

* Οὐ τυχὸν ἀνὰ.

principally to have fixed his attention. For these reasons, I reject the gratuitous and improbable assertion, which has been made,—that this clause concerning St. Paul was forged by some Christian*.

1. We see, hence, how well Christians were known in the third century;—and what respect their doctrine, even then obtained in the world from those, who, as far as their own personal interests might be affected, were either averse to embrace the Gospel, or at least quite careless concerning it.

2. Porphyry is the last unwilling witness for Christians whom I shall mention within the third century. There is a work, indeed, bearing his name, intitled the Philosophy of Oracles, in which there are very strong testimonies in favour of the Gospel: but, as it appears to have been written in the time of Constantine, or after the civil establishment of Christianity, the consideration of it properly belongs to the history of the next century.

Porphyry died at the age of about 71, at the end of Dioclesian's reign.

This man was born at Tyre in Phoenicia,—was a scholar of Plotinus, and,—like the rest of that school,—maintained a gravity of manners; and entered vigorously into Platonic refinements.—In acrimony against Christians he far exceeded them all. He took much pains to overturn the Gospel; and it must be confessed his learning and acuteness were considerable. The very few fragments extant of his works afford us no great opportunity to judge of the extent of his capacity, or of the depth of his judgment: but, from the serious pains taken by the ancient Christians to confute him, we may conclude that his abilities were of a far higher order than those of Celsus.

In a passage, preserved by Eusebius†, he censures the famous Origen for leaving Gentilism and embracing the barbarian temerity,—that is, the Gospel. That he states the fact erroneously is certain: for

* Longinus is said to have been put to death by Aurelian, A. D. 273.

† Euseb. Book 6, chap. 18.

ORIGEN.
XXI.

Origen was brought up under Christian parents, but I had almost said, that that great man merited such a reproach on account of the extravagant respect, which he paid to the enemies of Christianity. Porphyry allows him to have been a great proficient in philosophy; and says, — that he was very conversant with Plato, Longinus, and the works of the Pythagoreans and Stoics; — and, that he learnt from these the allegorical method of explaining the Greek mysteries, and by forced interpretations, inconsistent in themselves, and unsuitable to those writings, and applied it to the Jewish Scriptures.

EAS-EST ET AB HOSTE DOCTUS. — The fanciful mode of Origen in interpreting Scripture is here justly condemned by Porphyry: or, which is the same thing, — the Ammonian scheme is allowed by him to be unsuitable to those writings. Origen did much mischief by making such attempts: Let the word of God stand simple and alone; and let philosophers be left to their own inventions. — The enmity of Porphyry was not abated by the complaisance of philosophizing Christians; nor did their concessions make any converts to evangelical truth.

His captious reasonings against the book of Daniel show him to be a bitter, but ineffectual adversary to Christianity: The consideration of these, however, fall not within our design. — The same may be said of various evils which he made to many passages in the Gospel: — We have seen a sufficient specimen of the same spirit in Celsus.

Ingenuity and malevolence, when united, seldom fail in forming plausible objections, wherever opportunities offer. The censure which St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, has left upon St. Peter, engaged the attention of Porphyry, and induced him, from an occasional difference between the Apostles, to form an argument against the whole of their religion. I have, already, in the former part of this volume, stated my deliberate judgment on this sub-

* Lardner's Collections, chap. xxxvii.

ject, and, I may here add, — that the very clear testimony which St. Peter, toward the conclusion of his second epistle, gives to the inspired character of St. Paul, at the same time that it demonstrates the harmony of the Apostles, remains one of the fairest monuments of St. Peter's humility and candour. On examination, then, it appears, that these attacks of enemies are, in fact, so many evidences of the virtues and graces of the Christians. Surely truth, and wisdom, and goodness may well be presumed to be with those, whom their adversaries assault with such frivolous objections.

On account of an epidemical disorder raging in a certain city, Porphyry observes, "Men wonder now that distempers have seized the city so many years; they forget that Esculapius and the other gods no longer dwell among them; for, since Jesus was honoured, no one has received any public benefit from the gods."

What a testimony is this to the great progress of Christianity, in his day! Malevolence confesses, at the very time that it impiously and absurdly complains.

"Matrons and women," says Porphyry, "compose their senate, and rule in the churches; and the priestly order is disposed of according to their good pleasure."

The falsity of all this is notorious; but the testimony here given, by the mouth of an enemy, to the piety of the female Christians, is perfectly agreeable to the accounts of the New Testament, and to the history of all revivals of godliness in every age; in none of which women had the government, but, in all a great personal concern by their pious exertions. "There is neither male nor female, but ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

"If Christ be the way of salvation; the truth, and the life; and if they only, who believe in him,

shall be saved, what became of the men who lived before his coming*?"

The reader has often heard similar objections made in our days. The Christians preached then the same doctrine of salvation—**ONLY BY CHRIST**, which is now stigmatized as uncharitable.

"A person asked Apollo how to make his wife relinquish Christianity? It is easier, perhaps, replied the oracle, to write on water, or to fly into the air, than to reclaim her. Leave her, in her folly, to hymn in a faint mournful voice the dead God, who publicly suffered death from judges of singular wisdom†."

This story, told by Porphyry, is a memorable testimony of the constancy of Christians.—It also hence appears, that they were accustomed to worship Jesus as God; and, that they were not ashamed of this, notwithstanding the ignominy of his cross. The attestation, however, here given of the wisdom of Caiphas and of Pontius Pilate, will not so readily be admitted.

The enemies of vital godliness, in our days, may see from the various cavils and misrepresentations contained in these extracts, that their ancient brethren in infidelity have been beforehand with them in all their most material objections. The doctrine, the spirit, and the conduct of real Christians, appears from these evidences: And the work of the Spirit of God on the hearts of men, in attaching them to Jesus, and in divorcing them from all that the world delights in, is no less manifest than the malignity of our depraved nature in hating and opposing it.

* Eusebius.

† Bullet's History, II. c. 1

CHAP. XXII.

CONNECTION BETWEEN THE DOCTRINE AND
PRACTICE OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

I AM sensible, that many parts of the foregoing history may appear to several persons defective in point of candour.—“Why such solicitude to prove men Trinitarians in opinion?—Why so strict an eye kept, all along, on the doctrines commonly called Evangelical by enthusiasts and sectaries?—Of what importance are opinions, if men’s practice be right?—Why is not all the stress of commendation laid on holiness of life, on integrity, and on charity?”

This language is specious, but is chargeable with the following erroneous notion:—It supposes that there is no real connexion between doctrine and practice. Now, a sound Christian cannot admit,—however fashionable the sentiment may be,—that all sorts of religious opinions are equally influential, or equally ineffective in the production of virtuous conduct. The Scripture connects sanctification with belief of the truth*. Our Lord himself prays that his disciples may be “sanctified through the truth†:” “The blood of Christ purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God‡:” and a right faith in Jesus “overcomes the world.”—St. John challenges men to prove that they can overcome the world by any other way§: and, in the chapter now alluded to, he is very particular in describing what that faith is. In fine, Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works||.”—If then this zeal for good works be the EFFECT of HIS redemption,—how is it possible that a person, who disbelieves the important doctrines

* John, xvii. 19.

† 2 Thess. ii. 13.

‡ Heb. ix. 14.

§ 1 John, v. 5.

|| Titus, ii. 14.

essentially concerned in that redemption, should have any true zeal for good works. By the supposition, the man never uses, but has an aversion to, the means, which God has expressly appointed and made necessary for the attainment of this end.—Let this concise argument be well considered.

The peculiar doctrines of the Gospel are,—Original sin,—Justification by the grace of Jesus Christ,—His Godhead and atonement,—the Divinity and the efficacious influences of the Holy Ghost. We appeal to the Scriptures for the proof of this assertion. If it cannot be proved **THENCE**, it is not to be proved at all. The tradition of the Church, if it were more uniform than it is, can never sufficiently demonstrate it. But still, an authentic history of the character of the first Christians, is very instructive,—and as such, merits our most serious attention. We have found that the doctrines just stated, were, in the primitive times, constantly held by men allowed to be the most wise and upright. Surely, so remarkable a fact might well induce those, who, in our times, oppose these doctrines with all their power,—to hesitate a little,—to entertain doubts whether their own sentiments be right; and lastly—no longer to call their adversaries zealots in **SPECULATIVE** religion.—One would think, that when the Scripture itself affirms the existence of a connexion between faith and practice, and when the history of Christian antiquity exemplifies that connexion, neither the articles of belief themselves ought to be coldly denominated **SPECULATIVE**, nor the zeal used in supporting them be reproached with the contemptuous name of **ENTHUSIASM**.—Such reflections as these, it is hoped, may remove from the mind of the reader any unfavourable idea of the historian's disposition in regard to candour.—True candour consists,—not in endeavouring to render an adversary contemptible by using the hard terms, enthusiast, fanatic, bigot, and such like; but in fairly bringing forward and

digesting evidence, and in drawing warrantable inferences from it.

Two things have been shown to have uniformly taken place during the three first centuries ;—first, that there existed, all along, a number of persons bearing the Christian name, whose lives proved them to be “the excellent of the earth.” And secondly, that, as far as appears, the character of genuine virtue belonged exclusively to men who espoused the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. From the Apostles down to Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenæus ; and, from them, to the age of Origen, both these assertions are demonstrable by the clearest evidence.

Origen alone, of all persons of superior reputation in the Church, has been suspected as deficient in point of orthodoxy. If the suspicion were swelled into a certain proof, the discredit, which his philosophic mixtures have brought on his character, and the censures, which so many wise and good men have so freely passed on him, as unsound in the faith, would rather prove our assertion of the uniformity of Christian belief in these articles than the contrary. But, that Origen, on the whole, believed these doctrines, is sufficiently proved by express passages of his works :—and his well-known curious and adventurous spirit of inquiry in subjects on which he never meant to be positive, will account for his ambiguities.

I cannot allow Dionysius of Alexandria, merely because he was once suspected to be heretical, to be an exception to my position. His well-known explanation of himself sufficiently confutes the surmise. The age of Cyprian is full of the most luminous proofs. Even the treatise of Novatian on the Trinity is itself a strong argument on the same side of the question. An elaborate, copious, and distinct treatise on such a subject written by an innovator,—and the FIRST DISSENTER,—against whom I have

freely owned the best men of those times were much too censorious,—would doubtless have been branded with peculiar infamy in the Church, if it had contained any sentiments contrary to the apostolic faith. Its deviation from truth would have been marked with peculiar asperity. But it is universally allowed, that the Novatians held the same doctrines as the general Church, and differed only in point of discipline. What greater proof can be desired than such an uniformity?

Perhaps the cause of Paul of Samosata may illustrate the subject still more forcibly.—A bishop was, by the concurrent voice of the whole Christian Church, degraded and expelled, because he opposed these doctrines.—The excellent lives of men of orthodox views are evident in these times of true goodness. I cannot find any proofs of such excellence in other persons who called themselves Christians. I acknowledge the scantiness of historical materials : I make allowance for the prejudices of writers ; and, I do not forget, that the compositions of none, but of the orthodox of those times, have come down to us. But, after all, it seems impossible to reject the repeated testimony of such a man as Irenæus ; to the wickedness of the heretics.—The immoral character of Paul of Samosata is well known ; and men of real holiness and virtue can scarcely be entirely hid in any age in which they exist.

We have been told indeed great things of the Ebionites ; and they have been set up as the true standard of primitive orthodoxy. But it seems scarcely possible for any man of learning, who has a disposition to examine things fairly and candidly, to lay weight on such a wild and groundless opinion.—Who is this Ebion?—“ Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God ? ”—Let it be admitted that he and his party believed and thought of St. Paul and of Christian doctrines, and of Christ himself, exactly as

some persons do, who at this day call themselves RATIONAL Christians.—Will it thence follow that the holy Scriptures will be best interpreted by consulting the opinions of an obscure person, of whom all we know is contained in only a few lines, and whose very existence is but faintly proved; and whose sect also, though it had certainly an EARLY, if any, existence, was condemned in the Christian churches, and even by Origen himself, as heretical*?

It must be admitted that the Ebionites, in not receiving St. Paul's Epistles, as Origen tells us, acted CONSISTENTLY. THEIR sentiments, and those of St. Paul, are in direct opposition to each other.—But, what are we to think of men who rejected thirteen epistles of the New Testament, of whose divine authority there never was any doubt among real Christians?

And, though the Epistle to the Hebrews has abundant proofs of Divine inspiration, yet, if one were to allow, for a moment, that it was only the work of some pious person of very high antiquity in the Church, and held in very great estimation, who, that soberly examines the balance of evidences, would hesitate to decide that its authority greatly exceeded any possible respect due to the opinions of the Ebionites? Then,—in this regular argumentative composition we find certain doctrines enlarged on very much, and supported by the united voices of the Old and New Testament,—which doctrines, by an obscure sect, of whom we, literally, know next to nothing, are barely denied.—A chain of close reasoning on the one hand;—mere positive assertions on the other!

In judging of historical evidence, no rule can be better founded, than that the concurrent testimony of the best writers ought always to outweigh the single affirmation of any particular person.—It is on this ground that the relation of Persian affairs by Ctesias is looked on as romantic. The account of

* See Origen ad Celsum, Book 5, towards the end.

the death of Cyrus also, as slain by Tomyris, the Scythian Queen, has no credit, because of the superior credibility of Xenophon, and of other historians. And he would be thought a weak critic in history, who should in our days assert, that

“ Charlemagne, with all his peerage, fell by Fontarabia.”

Milton, as a poet, may be allowed to say this on the evidence of romances : But sober history, which asserts in general the contrary, must be believed.—On such weak foundations seems to me to stand the authority of the Ebionites in matters of Christian doctrine.

Let not the reader forget, that the object of this whole argument is to establish the indissoluble connexion, which subsists between principle and practice.—For this purpose it may be useful to attend a little to the INTERNAL NATURE of Christian principles.

If there be a favourite point in Scripture, it is the recommendation of humility. The truly humble, with all their imperfections, will be admitted into heaven ; the proud, with all the virtue compatible with pride, will be excluded. Those doctrines, therefore, which support humility must be divine : those, which nourish pride must be “ earthly, sensual, devilish *.” Now the evangelical doctrines, just mentioned, are all of the former sort. The more they are relished and admired, the more do they direct the mind to honour God, to feel even infinite obligation to him, to entertain the lowest ideas of ourselves, to confound the pride of intellect, of riches, of virtue, of every thing human. To sing salvation to God and the Lamb, to confess our desert of destruction, and to ascribe our deliverance from it to the atoning blood of Jesus,—this is the employment of heaven. The tastes and tempers adapted to such employment must be formed here

* James iii. 15.

on earth by GRACE; and the whole work of the Spirit, which we have seen exemplified in three centuries, is to produce and support these dispositions: And, in the words and actions of holy men, we have seen this effect. They believed heartily the truth of doctrines the most humiliating. They were poor in spirit, and patient under the severest treatment and the most cruel injuries, because they were conscious of deserving much worse: they were contented in the meanest circumstances, because they felt the beauty of HIS condescension, who though HE was rich became poor for their sakes, and who has provided for them sure and eternal riches. They were serene and confident in God, because they viewed HIM as their Father through the grace of Christ; they were full of charity, because they knew the love of God in Christ: and, in honour they preferred others to themselves, because they were ever conscious of their own depravity:—in fine, —they gladly endured reproach for Christ's sake, because they knew his kingdom was not of this world.

Now take from these men the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, and all the motives and springs within them of those actions, which are peculiar Christian, are annihilated.—Mere morals, as taught by sensible heathens, and whatever was by them esteemed reputable in social life, may remain; but that, which is properly of a pious and humble nature, is no more.

For, whoever daily feels himself to be helpless, corrupt, and unworthy; the man, whose hope of divine favour cannot exist for a moment, but under the belief of the most stupendous grace; the man, who is compelled to pray by the sense of his constant wants, and who experiences the answer of prayer by repeated supernatural aids, such a one must be habituated to the perpetual exercise of cultivating humbling reflections concerning himself, and

GRATEFUL feelings towards his Maker. It is easy to see what a foundation is here laid of meekness, gentleness, modesty, submission to the will of God, and of genuine compassion for the most wicked and most injurious,—the truly humbled Christian always remembering that he himself, by nature, is a child of wrath, as well as others.—Nor is there one among the numerous virtues, for which the primitive Christians were so much renowned, but it may be traced up to these principles.

It has been said, indeed,—that the sense of gratitude to God may be as strong in the minds of those who think better of human nature; in its present state, because they must own they are indebted to God for their natural powers and faculties. But the very feelings of the same human nature itself contradict the position. Something like gratitude and humility may be produced, where men are every moment, by experience, made sensible of their dependent condition : not so, where they only admit it in general theory, but are not led, experimentally, to an habitual sense of their real state. Do parents expect to find a more grateful and more humble conduct in their children, by making them completely independent at once, or, by supplying them liberally indeed, but still in such a way as to keep them continually sensible of their dependence?

The influence of anti-evangelical doctrines on the practice is but too evident.

—Those, who espouse them, if preserved, by Providence, in the practice of a decent moral conduct, are, among ourselves at this day, the proudest of men. Even when they attempt to be humble, the power of pride breaks forth and bears down all before it. They feel and discover great self-sufficiency : No subject of religion is too hard for their understandings : and in all disputable questions, they are sure to decide in that way which most gratifies vain-glory and self-conceit. The teachers of this stamp,

however low and limited in capacity and education, are continually exercising the most unbounded, and often the most ridiculous arrogance. They are apt to wonder that the common people have no EARS for them : They do not consider that they themselves have no VOICE for the people. The views of God, of Christ, and of human nature, which they exhibit, suit not the unsophisticated taste of the common people, but rather accord with the pert and vain notions of dabblers in theology and metaphysics. In a word, they contradict experience ; and it is not to be wondered at, that those of their hearers, who have any reasonable modesty, and the least tincture of humility, cannot relish their discourses, because the only food which is adapted to the taste of a miserable sinner is not ministered to them. Deserted by the populace, such ministers as these usually betake themselves to the higher classes : The favour of a few persons of rank compensates to them the want of regard from the multitude ; and if they cannot boast of numerous congregations, they console themselves at least with the thought, that theirs are genteel.—Their own account of them is “ that they are both genteel and rational.”

Politics,—the affairs of nations,—the reformation of states ; THESE are to them the grand scenes which agitate their passions. To instruct ministers of STATES is their ambition : To bring souls to Christ is left to those, whom they, contemptuously, denominate Enthusiasts. Nor does the least true pathos appear in any of their writings and orations, except in the support of civil liberty,—a subject, most important and most valuable, no doubt ; but, with them, ever carried to excess, and, even when treated in its best manner, belonging rather to the province of statesmen and of legislators than to that of divines.—Whoever has attended to the demeanour of these men, cannot fail to have marked them, as evidently haughty, over-bearing, impatient of con-

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tradition ; and, of all others, the least fitted, in their tempers, to suffer for the cross of Christ : They are, however, exceedingly prone,—to represent themselves as actually persecuted ;—to enlarge on the iniquity of all restraining or excluding laws in ecclesiastical concerns ;—and, lastly, with much arrogance, to boast of their sincerity and soundness in matters of religion,—in an age, when every one knows that there is not the least probability of their being compelled to undergo any fiery trial that might be the test of true Christian zeal, fortitude, and patience.

Are THESE the Christians of the three first centuries ?—Or, were those, whom Celsus scorned, such men as THESE ?—The facts presented to the reader, in this volume, forbid the conclusion.—For, if indeed they were men of this class, their worldly and ambitious spirit might easily have found some of the many pretenders to the Roman empire, with whom they might have united. We should have seen Christians active in politics, bargaining with different competitors for the empire, and insisting on some communication of temporal powers and privileges to themselves. Men, so void of heavenly ambition, would have displayed that which is of the earth ; and if Ebion's religious sentiments had been then as prevalent as they are now, the humble, meek, charitable, passive Christians would not have adorned the historic page ; but, on the contrary, the predominant characters of the foregoing narrative, must have much more resembled the turbulent, aspiring, political sons of Arius and Socinus in our own times.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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